

Introduction

Tania Paciaroni
Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, University of Zurich

Alice Idone
University of Zurich

Michele Loporcaro
University of Zurich, Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa

1. Background to the thematic issue

Agreement is a pervasive phenomenon in many languages of the world (Corbett 2006: 1), the object of unrelenting typological work (e.g. Matasović 2018), and a constant preoccupation of linguists of all persuasions both in the functional-typological approach (e.g. Nichols 2018; Forker 2018; Haig & Forker 2018) and in the formalist camp (e.g. Baker 2008; Preminger 2014; Bond et al. 2016; Franco et al. 2019; Smith et al. 2020). Yet, studies in the field still appear to be seeking a balance between large-scale generalizations and the detailed investigation of typologically rare phenomena, or *rara* (Plank 2000; Cysouw and Wohlgemuth 2010). Closer consideration of rare traits may lead one to refine the typology or challenge the theory; see e.g. Loporcaro (2015: 105–108) and Round (2019) for recent discussion. Investigating this tension is a major perspective of this thematic issue.

The volume grows out of the international conference “The many facets of agreement”, held at the University of Zurich on October 3rd–5th, 2019. The conference was organised by the three guest editors Tania Paciaroni, Alice Idone and Michele Loporcaro, together with our colleagues Serena Romagnoli and Chiara Zanini, in the context of the research project “The Zurich database of agreement in Italo-Romance” (DAI), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation [SNSF 100012-156530].

The idea behind the DAI-project was to investigate typologically interesting agreement phenomena in seven non-standard varieties of Italo-Romance and to make them accessible to international typological research and theory building. Non-standard Italo-Romance varieties, in fact, show extremely interesting agreement patterns, some of which are rare or even unparalleled across Indo-European. Regardless, these data have so far been unavailable to non-Italianist scholars, and therefore remain unexploited in general and typological studies on agreement. In order to fill this gap, the project set up an online database (<https://www.dai.uzh.ch/new/#!/public/home>) through which the primary data collected during fieldwork are publicly available to the international scientific community.

The typological framework underlying the structure of the database is Corbett's (2006). It includes the following elements: (i) *controller*, the element which determines the agreement; (ii) *target*, the element whose form is determined by agreement; (iii) *domain*, the syntactic environment in which agreement occurs; (iv) *features* and *values*, the properties which are concerned by agreement or expressed in the agreement; (v) *conditions*, if present.

By way of example, which illustrates the tension between typologically rare data and their implication for typology and theory, consider overt gender on nouns (i.e. the circumstance in which ‘the gender of a noun is evident from its form’, Corbett 1991: 62) in the Italo-Romance variety spoken in Ripatransone, which represents one of the seven DAI-points of investigation. We know that languages can display overt gender to different degrees depending on how much they rely on formal assignment rules, e.g. Italian shows a large degree of overt gender. Most,

but far from all, nouns overtly mark their gender in the singular by either /a/ (FEMININE) or /o/ (MASCULINE). On the other hand, the degree of overtness is much lower in French. But this is not the only dimension of variation. In Ripano overt gender on nouns depends also on the syntactic context (see Paciaroni & Loporcaro 2018). In (1) the noun 't:jembu is preceded by the complementizer *kə* (which is invariable). The morphosyntactic feature values MASCULINE and SINGULAR are realized by the same suffix *-u* both on the noun and on the agreeing adjective 'b:rut:u. In (2) the same lexical item 'time', with the same feature specification, is preceded by the definite article *lu* (as well as an adjective) and has a different form than in (1), with a final *-ə* instead of *-u*, which is ungrammatical.

- (1) *kə* 't:jemb-u/*-a 'b:rut:-u
 what time(M)-M.SG/-nonF.SG bad-M.SG
 'what a bad time/weather!'
- (2) *l-u* 'b:rut:-ə/*-u 'tjemb-ə/*-u
 DEF-M.SG bad-nonF.SG/-M.SG time(M)-nonF.SG/-M.SG
 'the bad weather'

Examples like these are unexpected from a theoretical perspective, because the dependency on the syntactic context has so far been observed only on agreement targets. To account for the facts represented in (1)-(2) we must allow for syntactic effects to impact a wider range of grammatical elements than previously thought, also including agreement controllers. Thus, Ripano presents a previously unknown condition on agreement.

The eight studies selected in this issue are thoroughly reworked versions of papers presented at the DAI conference, each looking at a different facet of agreement in a wide range of typologically diverse languages. A guiding principle behind the issue is that the rare phenomena are fragments of the agreement system of different language families which deserve closer examination. Each contribution represents empirically well-founded research which reviews the properties and peculiarities of the selected agreement phenomenon and tests the theory. This is achieved by examining agreement systems from various fields of study and in the light of a range of theoretical approaches. Some of the chapters in this issue directly deal with agreement diachronically. The study of the diachrony of agreement has recently achieved great advances, in particular thanks to the Marburg project led by Jürg Fleischer and colleagues (see Fleischer et al. 2015). Among the contributions to the volume, there is also a study on the acquisition of agreement patterns in a lesser-known Atlantic language, taking investigation of language acquisition beyond European languages. More generally, the perspective of micro-variation and spatial distribution of agreement phenomena is well represented in the book.

The languages under discussion mainly come from Indo-European, in particular from Germanic (Fleischer; Glaser) and Italo-Romance (Pescarini), but include also other language families such as Niger-Congo (Cabredo Hofherr & Creissels; Sagna, Vihman, Vihman & Brown), Papuan (Fedden), and Altaic languages (Lyutikova). The typology offered in Corbett's contribution derives from a large, areally and genetically diverse sample of languages.

2. Outline of the volume

This issue opens with a typological paper and then proceeds with seven studies on agreement phenomena in single languages or networks of related languages written by experts in the topics and languages in question.

The first chapter by **Greville G. Corbett** is an overhaul of the agreement hierarchy in the light of recent advances in typological disciplines. The agreement hierarchy consists of four principal target positions: attributive, predicate, relative pronoun and anaphoric personal pronoun. It constrains the distribution of alternative agreements, in that if a controller allows a choice of agreement, the likelihood of agreement with greater semantic justification increases monotonically as we move rightwards along the hierarchy. The agreement hierarchy is used extensively in current research, particularly in formal theories of syntax, and accounts for a wide range of data. Corbett focuses on agreement controllers, whose type range has expanded considerably over the last years and hence the area where the need for an update is most urgent. The canonical typology of controllers is shown to have two dimensions: lexeme to phrase, and local to extraneous (the latter involving honorific agreement, associative agreement, back agreement and “pancake sentences”) and also illustrates interactions between the different types of agreement controller, which prove revealing for the typology.

In the second chapter, **Serge Sagna, Virve-Anneli Vihman, Marilyn Vihman and Dunstan Brown** examine the acquisition of demonstratives in the highly complex system of Eegimaa (Atlantic, Senegal) with four demonstrative types that are differentiated morphologically and in their distributional properties. They investigate a mixed sample of longitudinal and cross-sectional recordings of children aged 2;0, 2;6, and 3;0 and of their caregivers, focussing on analyses of demonstrative forms and the syntactic contexts in which they are used. They observe that children at age two use an accurate, but restricted set of demonstratives. Evidence of generalization across the exemplars of demonstratives encountered in the input and productivity only come at age 2;6. By age three, children reproduce patterns of variability which more closely reflect the use of demonstratives in child-directed speech.

In the third chapter, **Patricia Cabredo Hofherr and Denis Creissels** examine the agreement system of Jóola Fóoñi, an Atlantic language of Senegal with a developed noun class system of the Niger-Congo type. Their contribution focuses on the indirect relationship between syntax and morphology in Jóola Fóoñi, describing the heterogeneous paradigms of nouns, modifiers and pronouns. They show that values structuring the inflectional paradigm of agreement targets cannot be reduced to agreement values triggered by nominal controllers. A particularly interesting case in point is the diachronic development of locative relativisers, which will be compared with the case of locative relativisers in French.

The fourth chapter is a study of agreement and argument realization in Mian discourse. **Sebastian Fedden** shows that there is little evidence that gender agreement serves reference tracking. Mian is a Papuan language of New Guinea with an interesting and rare property on the level of agreement targets, which can be exploited for the purposes of this study: object agreement in transitive verbs is ‘sporadic’, i.e. it depends on the lexical type of a transitive verb whether it agrees with its object in person, number and gender. This allows measuring whether speakers of Mian manipulate overt vs. null arguments in discourse to compensate whenever lack of agreement might make argument reference ambiguous. The focus is on gender agreement. The results of the study clearly show that the proportions of overtly realized objects for agreeing verbs and non-agreeing verbs do not differ significantly, thus lending little support to the claim that gender agreement serves a major function in reference tracking in discourse.

In the fifth chapter, **Jürg Fleischer** develops a diachronic perspective on “evasive constructions” in literary New High German (from approximately 1650), which can be used to avoid a difficult choice when for example referring to people of more than one or unknown social gender and masculine or feminine forms might therefore be felt inappropriate. A construction largely obsolete in present-day Standard German, but well-attested until the 19th century, and in some varieties even today, is the use of indefinite pronouns in the neuter singular. The chapter discusses the grammatical properties of this construction and shows that neuter is used for a specific semantic value, namely, to indicate more than one social gender simultaneously or to leave social gender explicitly open.

The sixth chapter by **Elvira Glaser** and **Sandro Bachmann** presents new empirical findings on the conditions on and the spatial distribution of (co)predicative agreement in adjectives and past participles in Highest Alemannic dialects. In contrast to Standard German in which agreement of adjectives and past participles outside the noun phrase was lost, some Swiss German dialects still show this type of agreement. The chapter focuses (i) on the extent, function and distribution of agreement within the clausal domain on the basis of survey data from Swiss German varieties and (ii) the use and function of non-canonical neuter agreement.

Based on a sample of 187 Italo-Romance dialects, in the seventh chapter, **Diego Pescarini** investigates the relationship between the presence and shape of subject clitics and verbal endings in an original perspective, by using quantitative methods that allow a statistical measurement of the significance of such connections. The majority of languages have more subject clitics than distinctive inflectional endings, yielding overspecified systems. Further, close dialects exhibit more similarities in the inflectional system than in clitic systems. These results support the claim that inventories of subject clitics do not reflect the array of inflectional endings, but rather that further factors are probably involved in the emergence of subject clitics, factors such as either feature geometries/filters or *third factors* in Chomsky’s sense, i.e. factors that are related to computational efficiency and/or processing costs.

In the eight chapter, **Ekaterina Lyutikova** analyses the agreement pattern attested with inflected quantifiers, intensifiers and anaphors in Tatar, which can trigger not only a default 3rd person agreement, but also the marked person agreement reflecting the features of their restrictor or binder. The article proposes a mechanism allowing the agreement targets under discussion to acquire the features of their restrictor or binder, building on the idea that agreeing inflected quantifiers, intensifiers and anaphors contain a minimal pronoun equipped with a set of unvalued interpretable features, and that this feature set is valued via agreement. The data from Tatar add a new empirical dimension to work on person agreement phenomena.

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