On PERSON, animacy and \(\phi\)-Agree in copular agreement in Czech

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We present new data from agreement in Czech copular clauses which provide evidence for \([+\text{PERSON}]\) feature being dependent on animacy (Adger & Harbour 2007, a.o.). We argue that an empirical adequate analysis requires a Multiple Agree structure in the sense of Hiraíwa (2005). Interestingly, if a \(\phi\)-feature deficient element enters a Multiple-Agree chain with valued \(\phi\)-features, these valued features restrict the interpretation of the pronoun – but only if the pronoun is \([+\text{PERSON}]\) because only \([+\text{PERSON}]\) pronouns come with a presupposition that may be directly related to \(\phi\)-feature valuation (Heim 2008, Sudo 2012, a.o.).

The puzzle: In Czech copular clauses, the copula (‘be’) is morphologically marked for person and number, and in the past tense also for GENDER. In NP\(_1\)-NP\(_2\) copular clauses, the values of the \(\phi\)-features are determined by NP\(_1\) even if both NPs are in Nominative and irrespective of their word order, (1). (Because of space limitation we leave out details of the syntactic structure of NP\(_1\)-NP\(_2\) copular clauses, and syntactic tests that determine which NP is NP\(_1\).) Note that since the copula strictly agrees with NP\(_1\), the \(\phi\)-features of NP\(_1\) and NP\(_2\) do not need to be identical.

(1) a. (Tenhle) mladík byl */byla babiččina zdravotní sestra.
   (this) young man.M */was.3SG.M */was.3SG.F grandma’s nurse.F
   ‘This young man was grandma’s nurse.’
   b. Babiččina zdravotní sestra byl */byla (tenhle) mladík.
   grandma’s nurse.F was.3SG.M */was.3SG.F (this) young man.M
   ‘As for my grandma’s nurse, it was this young man.’

The agreement pattern plays out differently if NP\(_1\) is realized by \(\phi\)-feature-invariant pronoun TO (roughly ‘it’). Even though the pronoun itself is morphologically 3SG.N, it may refer to a linguistic antecedent in any GENDER and number. Thus, all the NPs in (2-a) are good antecedents for TO in (2-b). Crucially, in copular clauses with TO, the copular agreement is with NP\(_2\), (2-b).

(2) a. Anna napsala knížku /lepolero /román.
   ‘Anna has written a book/a pop-up book/a novel.’
   b. *Byla */bylo /byl to propadák.
   was.3SG.F /was.3SG.N /was.3SG.M TO.3SG.N. flop.M
   ‘It [=the book/the pop-up book/the novel] was a total flop.’

There is another difference in the TO-NP\(_2\) pattern: in contrast to (1), if TO has an animate antecedent and NP\(_2\) denotes an animate-like attributive property, NP\(_2\) must agree in ‘animate’ gender (F, M) with the antecedent of TO (neuter NP\(_2\) is marginally acceptable), (3)–(4). More precisely, the GENDER on NP\(_2\) forces TO to pick an antecedent of the same GENDER (# indicates semantic infelicity).

(3) Jana často povídá o své babičce.
   Jana often talked about self grandmother.F
   ‘Jana often talks about her grandmother.’
   a. Byla to hodná paní.
   was.3SG.F TO.3SG.N kind lady.F
   ‘She (= Jana’s grandmother) was a kind lady.’
   b. #Byl */byla to starý dobrák.
   was.3SG.M /was.3SG.F TO.3SG.N old good-man.M
intended: ‘She (= Jana’s grandmother) was a generally kind person.’

(4) V nemocniˇ cn´ ím pokoji mojí babiˇ cky byl nˇ ejaký mladý muˇ ž.
‘There was a young man in my grandmother’s hospital room.’

a. #Byla /*byl */ to zdravotní sestra.

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{was.3SG.} & \text{F} / \text{was.3SG.M to.3SG.N health sister.} & \text{F} \\
\end{array}\]

intended: ‘He was a nurse.’

Crucially, if we replace the past tense copula with its present tense counterpart which is unmarked for GENDER, as in (5), the problem with the GENDER clash goes away. Similarly, if the antecedent is animate but NP$_2$ is inanimate, the GENDER values may be distinct, (6); thus they pattern as NP$_1$-NP$_2$ in (1).

(5) Je to hodná paní /starý dobrák /zlat´ íˇ cko.

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{is.} & \text{3SG} / \text{TO.3SG.N kind lady.} & \text{F} / \text{old good man.} & \text{M} / \text{little gold.} & \text{N} \\
\end{array}\]

‘She (= Jana’s grandmother) is a kind lady/good old man/darling.’

(6) a. Je /Byla to kˇ rehká kvˇ etinka.

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{is.} & \text{3SG} / \text{was.3SG.F to.3SG.N fragile flower.} & \text{F} \\
\end{array}\]

‘She (= Jana’s grandmother) is/was a delicate woman.’

b. Je /Byl to metr´ aˇ cek.

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{is.} & \text{3SG} / \text{was.3SG.M to.3SG.N metric-ton.} & \text{M} \\
\end{array}\]

‘She (= Jana’s grandmother) is/was fat.’

c. Je /Bylo to stˇ revo.

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{is.} & \text{3SG} / \text{was.3SG.N to.3SG.N intestine.} \text{N} \\
\end{array}\]

‘She (= Jana’s grandmother) is /was a silly woman.’

The proposal: We assume Agree analysis of agreement (Chomsky 2000). We follow Béjar and Rezac 2003, Rezac 2004 in that PERSON and φ-features may probe separately. However, we depart from them in that we argue that the separate matching links form a multiple Agree configuration in the sense of Hiraiwa (2001). Furthermore, we argue that NPs in 3rd PERSON lack a PERSON feature, unless they are animate. In other words, we argue that animacy is formally represented as valued PERSON feature, and that if PERSON feature is valued, GENDER feature is dependent on PERSON. Furthermore, we assume that the invariable pronoun TO is φ-feature deficient. However, since it is deictic, it carries an unvalued PERSON feature which may be in principle - as for other pronouns (Heim 2008, Sudo 2012) - valued either from the structure or from the context. Finally, we assume that the past tense copula carries unvalued φ-features but no PERSON feature, while the present tense copula lacks unvalued φ-features. The Czech patterns are then derived as follows: (i) NP$_1$-NP$_2$ [= (1)]: The copular head (Pred) Agrees with NP$_1$, its closest probe, in φ-features. Since all features of the probe are valued by NP$_1$, they become deactivated. (ii) TO-inanNP$_2$ [= (6)]: The copular probe first probes TO. Even though TO cannot value any of the φ-features of the probe, it is still visible for Agree as it carries an active PERSON feature. However, since TO cannot value the φ-features of the probe, another Agree link is established. This time with NP$_2$ which can value and deactivate the φ-features of the probe. Even though TO is part of the multiple Agree configuration, its PERSON feature cannot be valued as the inanimate NP lacks PERSON feature. (iii) TO-animNP$_2$ [= (3)–(4)]: As in (ii), after the probe reaches NP$_2$ its φ-features get valued by NP$_2$. However, since TO is part of the same multiple Agree link, its PERSON feature – and in turn its GENDER feature – gets valued by the animacy-based PERSON feature on NP$_2$. If the GENDER/PERSON feature matches that of its antecedent, the structure is felicitous. If it does not, the GENDER clash yields