

Person dissimilation in the derivation of agreement alternations

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Context. Nevins (2007) proposes a dissimilation analysis of the Spanish “spurious *se*” phenomenon, in which the expected clitic cluster *le lo* (3.DAT 3.ACC) is realized as *se lo*, with an opaque occurrence of the reflexive/impersonal clitic *se*. Nevins takes the *le lo* cluster to violate a constraint against adjacent identical person features. The violation is repaired by deleting the person features of the first clitic, leading to its spellout as the underspecified elsewhere form *se* rather than the third-person form *le*.

Proposal. I show that the Algonquian languages, like Spanish, display instances of dissimilatory feature deletion triggered by a constraint against adjacent identical person features. In Algonquian, however, the person features in question occur on agreement heads rather than on clitics. The occurrence of dissimilatory feature deletion thus gives rise to complex agreement alternations, which take the form of a direct-inverse pattern in one context and a split-ergative pattern in another context. The proposed analysis reduces both of these agreement alternations to a simple feature deletion process.

Outline of the analysis. As illustrated by the Nishnaabemwin form in (1) (Valentine 2001), an Algonquian verb can appear with up to three agreement suffixes, which I take to spell out Voice°, Infl°, and C° (cf. Brittain 1999; Branigan & MacKenzie 1999; Oxford 2014). Agreement on Voice° uniformly targets the object, but agreement on Infl° and

(1) ‘we see them’

		Voice°	Infl°	C°
<i>ni-</i>	<i>waabm</i>	<i>-aa</i>	<i>-naany</i>	<i>-ag</i>
1	see	3	1p	3p
		OBJ	SUBJ	OBJ

C° is able to target either argument. Many configurations of agreement features are thus possible. Across all configurations, however, a generalization can be made: **whenever two adjacent agreement heads target the same goal, the lower of the two heads is spelled out as an underspecified elsewhere form.** That is, identical agreement on Infl° and Voice° results in deletion of the features of Voice°, while identical agreement on C° and Infl° results in deletion of the features of Infl°. The former context gives rise to a direct-inverse pattern while the latter gives rise to a split-ergative pattern. Both patterns are ultimately the result of the dissimilatory deletion of the person features of the lower head under identity with those of the higher head.

1. Infl°-agreement impoverishes Voice°-agreement. Nishnaabemwin forms in which Voice° targets the object and Infl° targets the subject are shown in (2). (C° is absent in this inflectional paradigm.) Pluralizing the object in these forms has the effect of attracting Infl°-agreement to the object, as in (3). Importantly, the appearance of object agreement in Infl° has a side-effect: the object agreement that otherwise appears in Voice° vanishes, leaving Voice° to be uniformly spelled out as *-igo*. I propose that *-igo* is the elsewhere realization of Voice°, spelled out when the person features on Voice° have been deleted under identity with the person features on Infl°. In other words, the *-igo* marker is an Algonquian analog of spurious *se*.

(2) Infl° → subject, Voice° → object

		Voice°	Infl°	
<i>waabm</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-d</i>		‘she sees me’
see	1	3		
<i>waabm</i>	<i>-ih</i>	<i>-g</i>		‘she sees you’
see	2	3		
		OBJ	SUBJ	

(3) Infl° → object, Voice° → elsewhere

		Voice°	Infl°	
<i>waabm</i>	<i>-igo</i>	<i>-yaang</i>		‘she sees us’
see	ELSE	1p		
<i>waabm</i>	<i>-igo</i>	<i>-yeg</i>		‘she sees you (pl)’
see	ELSE	2p		
		OBJ	OBJ	

The *-igo* suffix is traditionally described as an INVERSE marker that appears when the direction of transitivity opposes the person hierarchy 1/2 > 3 > 3'. The impoverishment analysis requires no notion of inverse marking: *-igo* is simply the underspecified elsewhere form of the object-agreement head Voice°.

2. C°-agreement impoverishes Infl°-agreement. The data in this section involve intransitive forms, in which Voice° is absent, leaving only C° and Infl° to interact. The potential for interactions is reduced further by the fact that C°-agreement only targets third persons. First- and second-person intransitive forms thus invariably display Infl°-agreement, as shown in (4a–b). (In the inflectional paradigm that I display here,

Infl^o-agreement is realized by a prefix-suffix combination.) Since Infl^o and C^o can both index third persons, we might expect to see both Infl^o and C^o agreement in third-person forms, as in (4c). However, this is not the case: as shown in (4d), third-person C^o-agreement appears, but the usual position of Infl^o-agreement is instead occupied by a suffix *-w*. The pattern is analogous to that in (3) above: agreement in a higher head (C^o) erases duplicate agreement in a lower head (Infl^o). I thus propose that the *-w* suffix is another “spurious *se*”: it is the elsewhere spell-out of Infl^o, inserted when the person features of Infl^o have been deleted under identity with those of C^o.

The agreement interaction in third-person intransitive forms gives rise to a split-ergative agreement pattern. Compare the transitive forms in (5) with the intransitive forms in (6). In the transitive forms, the subject is uniformly indexed by Infl^o and the object is uniformly indexed by C^o. In the intransitive forms, first- and second-person subjects are indexed by Infl^o, like transitive subjects, but third-person subjects are indexed by C^o, like transitive *objects*. As Bruening (2007) observes for the equivalent data in Passamaquoddy, this is a textbook example of a person-based split-ergative agreement pattern: a subset of intransitive subjects (i.e. third-person subjects) are indexed like transitive objects (i.e. by C^o). Under the proposed analysis, there is nothing deeply ergative about the morphosyntax: the split-ergative pattern is simply the result of impoverishment of Infl^o-agreement whenever it happens to be duplicated by C^o-agreement.

(4) Intransitive forms

			Infl ^o	C ^o		
a.	1p	ni- 1	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	-min 1p	—	‘we sleep’
b.	2p	gi- 2	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	-m 2p	—	‘you sleep’
c.	*3p	o- 3	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	-waa 3p	-ag 3p	*‘they sleep’
d.	3p	—	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	<i>-w</i> ELSE	-ag 3p	‘they sleep’

(5) Transitive (subject agreement in bold)

		Voice ^o	Infl ^o	C ^o		
	ni- 1	<i>waabm</i> see	-aa 3	-naany 1p	<i>-ag</i> 3p	‘we see them’
	gi- 2	<i>waabm</i> see	-aa 3	-waa 2p	<i>-ag</i> 3p	‘you see them’
	o- 3	<i>waabm</i> see	-aa 3	-waa 3p	<i>-an</i> OBJ	‘they see another’
			OBJ	SUBJ	OBJ	

(6) Intransitive (subject agreement in bold)

			Infl ^o	C ^o	
	ni- 1	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	-min 1p	—	‘we sleep’
	gi- 2	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	-m 2p	—	‘you sleep’
	—	<i>nibaa</i> sleep	<i>-w</i> ELSE	-ag 3p	‘they sleep’
			1/2SUBJ	3SUBJ	

3. C^o-agreement does not impoverish Voice^o-agreement. The transitive forms in (5) illustrate another point. In these forms, Voice^o and C^o both target the object, and no impoverishment occurs. Evidently, then, the constraint on identical person features applies only to *adjacent* agreement heads (Infl^o/Voice^o or C^o/Infl^o).

Implications. This presentation shows that complex morphosyntactic patterns such as inverse marking and person-based split ergativity can arise as the epiphenomenal consequence of a simple constraint on adjacent identical person features. The repair of illicit configurations can have different descriptive effects depending on which heads and features are involved in the agreement interaction. This conclusion extends the proposal in Nevins 2007 from clitics to agreement heads. We gain insight into the nature of this impoverishment operation from the fact that it is always the *lower* of the two heads that gets impoverished, a result which indicates that the syntactic positions of the two heads play a role in the outcome of impoverishment.

REFERENCES • Branigan & MacKenzie 1999. Binding relations and the nature of *pro* in Innu-aimun. *NELS* 29. • Brittain 1999. A reanalysis of transitive animate theme signs as object agreement. *Papers of the 30th Algonquian Conference*. • Bruening 2007. Passamaquoddy as a split ergative language. Ms. • Nevins 2007. The representation of third person and its consequences for person-case effects. *NLLT* 25. • Oxford 2014. *Microparameters of agreement*. PhD thesis, Toronto. • Valentine 2001. *Nishnaabemwin reference grammar*. University of Toronto Press.