Why there is no such thing as Closest Conjunct Case

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Background: In recent years, a great of number of cases of so-called *Closest Conjunct Agreement* have been reported (see Aoun et al 1994, Bošković 1997, 2009, Munn 1999, Citko 2004, van Koppen 2007, Benmamoun et al 2009, Bhatt & Walkow 2012 and many more). Given that the standard theory usually ties case assignment and ϕ-agreement together to a single process (or views them at least as closely related), we might wonder whether we find instances of *Closest Conjunct Case* - a situation where only the closest conjunct of nominal coordination receives a certain case. In fact, the literature contains several claims that such a phenomenon is attested (see e.g. McCloskey 1986, Johannessen 1998, Walkow 2013). However, an in-depth study of an instance of Closest Conjunct Case has not been done so far.

Claim: On the basis of 14 case studies about apparent counterexamples, I show that these claims cannot be maintained and that the hypothetical phenomenon of Closest Conjunct Case does not exist. Counterexamples are refuted either due to a misanalysis of the underlying syntactic structure or to the application of a superficial morphological operations such as ellipsis or allomorphy. To be more precise, I claim that the generalization in (1) holds crosslinguistically:

(1) **Symmetry of Case in Conjunction (SOCIC):**
Case is always evenly distributed amongst all of the conjuncts in nominal conjunction.

I show that (1) allows to distinguish between different accounts of case assignment: (a) the standard approach where case assignment and ϕ-agreement are tied together faces serious problems trying to derive (1), (b) a configurational case account can derive (1) by making additional stipulations, (c) (1) falls out of an Upward Agree account that separates Case assignment and ϕ-Agree as in Wurmbrand (2014) without further ado.

Apparent Counterexamples fall into three classes: (i) *Phrasal Clitics:* What seems to be a case marker of one conjunct, is in fact a marker attaching to the whole conjunction phrase (&P). Examples are found in Estonian, Udmurt, Hungarian, Welsh, etc. In Estonian, the terminative case seems to cliticize to the last conjunct only. However, adjectival agreement shows that the marker attaches to the whole conjunction and that every conjunct bears genitive (cf. (2)).

(2)   Ta   jook-sis [jõe   ja suu-re   puu]-ni.
3SG run-3SG [river.GEN and big-GEN tree.GEN]-TERM
'He went to the river and the big tree.'   Estonian: Triinu Viilukas (p.c.)

(ii) *Suspended Affixation:* (SA) In some languages affixes of non-final conjuncts are elided under identity with affixes of the final conjunct. The systematic nature of SA and the fact that other affixes (like plural or possessive affixes) are affected as well, strongly suggests that case-marking applies symmetrically and the seemingly asymmetric pattern is due to a superficial ellipsis operation. (cf also Ershler (2012), Guseva & Weisser (2015)). Examples of SA languages are: Turkish, Japanese, Korean, Armenian, Mari and many more.

(3)   köy,   kasaba ve kent-ler-imiz-den
village town   and city-PL-1PL.POSS-ABL
'from our villages, towns, cities.'   Turkish: Göksel & Kerslake (2005)

(iii) *Allomorphy*: In some languages, certain pronouns use different forms when adjacent to the conjunction. For English, Emonds (1986), Sobin (1997), Parrott (2009) have argued that conjoined pronouns regularly bear default object case. Only in some arbitrary contexts, e.g. a first person singular pronoun right-adjacent to the conjunction *and*, the subject form can be used (*'You and I'*). In Italian, the second person singular pronoun *tu* (and only that one) uses the object form when right-adjacent to the conjunction *'Io e te' (me and you)*. In Modern Irish, a

similar phenomenon arises since a special form of third person pronouns are used when adjacent to the verb. As a result of this allomorphy, the conjuncts seem to bear different cases.

Coordination ellipsis as well as allomorphy are superficial processes that apply late on PF. And since the three phenomena (i)-(iii) cover all the cases of seemingly asymmetric case assignment reported in the literature, I conclude that case assignment generally symmetric.

Theoretical Implications: (1) leaves us with a mismatch: Case assignment always adresses all conjuncts evenly whereas ϕ-agreement sometimes shows asymmetry effects, i.e. contexts where only the features of one of the conjuncts (usually the closest) are taken into account. This mismatch becomes apparent in examples as (4), abstractly represented in (5):

(4)   Qaraʔa   [ʕaliyaa   wa   ʕumar]   l-qiṣṣa
       read.3.FEM.SG Alia.FEM and Omar.MASC the-story
       'Alia and Omar read the story.'   Standard Arabic: Aoun et al (1994:207)

(5)   [... V+T ... [$_{\&P}$ Subj$_1$ & Subj$_2$] Obj]

Both conjoined subjects receive nominative case but only the left conjunct triggers ϕ-agreement on T. Crucially, (1) states that these mismatches are always in the same direction. Case is always symmetric, ϕ-agreement is not. I argue that, based on this finding, we can draw the conclusion that the mismatch in (5) forces us to dissociate case assignment and ϕ-agreement. If case only emerges as a reflex of ϕ-agreement between a case assigner and a DP as the standard theory (Chomsky 1995,2001) assumes, we have no straightforward way of explaining (5). Since case marking, in this theory, depends on Agree and there is arguably no Agree between Subj$_2$ and T, nominative assignment to Sub$_2$ remains mysterious. There are various proposals of how to derive CCA under the standard theory (e.g. Bošković 2009, Marušič et al 2015, Puškar & Murphy 2015) but I show that none of them can of derive the mismatch in (5) without implausible assumptions. Therefore, I conclude that case and ϕ-Agreement must dissociated. As a result, I review several theories that dissociate case assignment and ϕ-agreement: (i) a configurational account of case assignment (Marantz 1991, McFadden 2004, Preminger 2014) can derive the mismatch in (5) but needs to make some non-trivial assumptions: Since the number of co-arguments in these accounts plays a crucial role, it must be ensured that the &P-node enters the case competition with the object instead of the conjunct DPs. Also, the conjuncts within a DP must be prevented from entering a case-competition with each other. Finally, after the &P receives case via case competition, it must percolate it downwards evenly among all of its conjuncts. (ii) An upwards Agree account that dissociates case and ϕ-agreement (see e.g. Wurmbrand 2014, Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2015, Smith 2015) enables us to derive the generalization in (1) and the mismatch in (5) without further ado. If case probes are allowed to probe upward independently, then each conjunct can probe upwards and due to their relative position, all conjuncts necessarily find the same case assigner. If we assume further that downward Agree of the ϕ-probe on T is only possible either on PF (Wurmbrand 2014, Smith 2015) or as a result of an already established upward Agree relation (Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2015), then an answer can be provided why some ϕ-probes consider only Subj$_1$'s features .

Selected References: • Ershler 2012. Suspended Affixation and the Structure of the Syntax-Morphology Interface. Linguistica Hungarica 59 • Guseva & Weisser 2015. Postsyntactic Reordering in the Mari Nominal Domain - Evidence from Suspended Affixation. • Marušič et al 2015. The Grammars of Conjunction Agreement in Slovenian. Syntax 18 • Smith 2015. Feature Mismatches: Consequences for Syntax, Morphology and Semantics. Phd Thesis, UConn • Walkow 2013. When can you agree with the closest conjunct? WCCFL 31 • Wurmbrand 2014. The Merge Condition. A syntactic approach to selection. In: Minimalism and Beyond: Radicalizing the Interfaces.