On semantic agreement

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We discuss semantic agreement, cases in which agreement between a head and a DP seems to drive, or be driven by, interpretive properties of this DP rather than its syntactic properties. This discussion centers mostly on the case of subject/verb number and person agreement (but its conclusions would extend to other cases of agreement between a head and a DP). In such a configuration, semantic agreement occurs in cases in which the feature values on T do not seem to match the feature values of its DP subject. More specifically, we conclude that features on agreeing heads can and sometimes must be semantically interpretable. In such cases, the values of the features on T can target the denotational properties of its DP subject, instead of its phi (ϕ)-feature (values): they can or must trigger a presupposition about this DP subject's denotation.

1 Introduction

We discuss agreement between a subject and a head, mostly tense head (T) and its subject, exemplified by plural agreement below, which we call semantic agreement:

(1)   This northern team are playing.

We conclude that semantic agreement is meaningful: features on T carry presuppositions limiting the denotational possibilities of the subject.[1]

Unlike syntactic agreement between a head and a determiner phrase (DP), semantic agreement can hold between a head and a DP only if they are in a Spec/Head relation at L(ogical) F(orm). That it must hold at LF follows from agreement features triggering presuppositions as they are interpretive properties that must be satisfied at LF. That it must be Spec/Head follows from locality requirements on how presuppositions can be satisfied: a presupposition on item X can only constrain the interpretive properties of elements in a local syntactic relation with X. Due to their nature, phi (ϕ)-features on T can only constrain T's subject.

We discuss three kinds of semantic agreement cases: "British" English and French (pseudo) partitive structures, and conjoined DPs: all three share characteristic properties of semantic agreement but they also differ. In the first two, semantic agreement is merely an option which, when exercised, triggers the presupposition mentioned above. In the last case (conjunctions), semantic agreement is mandatory because a conjunction of DPs lacks the features needed for syntactic agreement, as we conclude in agreement with previous works.

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1   Throughout, we will say 'features on T', but it may well be that agreement features head their own projection to which T raises.

2 Patterns of semantic agreement

2.1 British collective nouns

2.1.1 Basic data

Singular British collective nouns such as *team*, *committee*, *government*, or *family* are able to trigger two different agreement patterns, singular and plural:[2]

(2)   A/this/*these northern team is/are playing. (plural: ≈ the
        team members are playing)

Singular agreement on T exemplifies syntactic (standard) agreement. In syntactic agreement, T and its subject have matching ϕ-features (possibly via copying or valuing). In such a case, the subject references either an abstract entity (a structure, e.g., a family) and/or the individuals composing this structure (the family members). The existence of plural agreement has long been noted and discussed in the semantic literature (see e.g., Barker, 1992, Schwarzschild, 1996). The reason for this is that with plural agreement as (2), the subject can only reference the plurality of the individuals composing the team being talked about. This exemplifies what we will call "semantic agreement". While the term "semantic agreement" is sometimes used in the literature, it is not always or consistently defined. Sometimes it means agreement involving features that have a semantic interpretation but such agreement can be, and often is, handled by standard syntactic agreement rules.[3] We take *semantic agreement* to be illustrated by well-formed cases in which a head like T and its subject have mismatching morphological features with some required semantic match between how the subject is interpreted and the features values on T. As a preliminary step, we adopt the following characterization for core cases:

(3)   Semantic agreement is a relation between a head and
        its subject with mismatching features (e.g., for a DP, the
        morphological ϕ-feature values of its Num node).[4]

Calling such a configuration "semantic agreement" is for now purely terminological. A priori, it could be reduced to syntactic agreement by postulating hidden ϕ-features on the subject matching T's features (see Section 4 for some discussion of such options). We will argue instead that such agreement tracks interpretive properties when such properties are either not represented syntactically, or are inaccessible to the standard

syntactic agreement rule: semantic agreement can arise, we will argue, precisely because the subject has ϕ-feature values not matching those of T, or because it lacks ϕ-features altogether.[5]

Syntactic and semantic agreements behave asymmetrically in a variety of ways that we now illustrate, raising analytical challenges, in particular, to any kind of unified treatment: as we will see, semantic agreement displays different properties than syntactic agreement. In the end, these properties define what should be called "semantic agreement" even if there is no feature mismatch.

1. **First asymmetry**: With such collective nouns, a singular DP external agreement can be singular or plural while DP internal agreement can only be singular. This is illustrated by the impossibility of having a plural determiner with a singular noun as shown in (2) (e.g., *these team-sg = these team members).

2. **Second asymmetry**: Such singular DPs can denote either a singleton (a committee, which is an abstract entity) or a plurality (the committee members) in a singular DP. With predicates applying equally well to the abstract entity or to its members, we observe:

(4)   a.   This committee is old.
                  sg agreement: subject singular or plural denoting
        b.   *These committees is old.
                  sg agreement: subject cannot be plural denoting only
        c.   This committee are old.
                  pl agreement: subject plural denoting only (members)

Singular agreement requires a singular subject ((4-a) vs. (4-b)). A singular DP normally denotes a singleton but may here denote a plurality, as allowed by these NPs. In (4-a), *old* can apply to the committee (it has been around for a long time) or to its members (they are old). With plural agreement, only this second interpretation is possible: the singular DP must denote a plurality viz., (4-c). In addition, predicates only applying to members e.g., *tall*, are compatible with singular or plural agreement, as in (5-a). Predicates only applying to the abstract entity, e.g., *be founded*, only allow singular agreement as in (5-b).

(5)   a.   This committee is/are tall
                  sg or pl agreement: pred only applies to members
        b.   This committee was/*were founded last year
                              *pl: pred applies to structure only

This again illustrates that plural agreement requires a plurality denotation, hence here that the predicate applies to members. Singular agreement is unselective. This leads to the following descriptive generalization which characterizes the patterns in (4) and (5), and illustrates that semantic agreement has an interpretive component that syntactic agreement lacks:

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2 This is also found in some other varieties of English, e.g., Canadian English, and Australian English, with variations in all varieties as to which collective nouns allow plural agreement; see (Levin, 2001). The judgments reported here are from a set of British English speakers.

3 For example, subject/verb agreement in Number does track an interpreted property–number–but this does not mean that agreement is semantic if this number property is syntactically represented on the subject.

4 This will be good enough for our present purpose but may need to be refined depending on how cases of "unagreement" in Höhn, 2016's terms discussed in Höhn (2016) and in Ackema and Neeleman (2018) are analyzed. In addition, this definition could be extended to handle agreement relations between other kinds of items, e.g., DP internally, which we do not discuss here.

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5 This is thus a different notion of semantic agreement than that proposed e.g., in Wechsler (2011) or Wechsler and Hahm (2011). Furthermore, the full range of semantic agreement could in principle include cases of matching features, if such cases behave the same way as the mismatching core cases–see footnote 27. Ultimately, semantic agreement on a head will be cases in which the features on this head impose interpretive restrictions on its subject.

(6) **Agreement–denotation correlation**:
  a. Semantic plural agreement on T requires the subject to denote a plurality only.
  b. Singular syntactic agreement on T requires a subject denoting either a singleton or, if allowed as with collective nouns, a plurality.[6,7]

Clause (a) derives why (4-c) is unambiguous, and why (5-b) is ill-formed. Clause (b) derives why (4-a) is ambiguous, and why singular agreement is allowed in (5-a).

3. **Third asymmetry:** A third asymmetry is illustrated by cases, some of which are discussed in Smith (2017) and Smith (2021), and others ((7-a), (7-f), and (7-g)) discussed and some experimentally investigated in Sturt (2022): the two different agreement options can coexist within a single sentence, but asymmetrically. When there are two possible agreement targets, uniform agreement–that is, both singular or both plural–is always fine (and is the default). But it is also possible for there to be a mismatch, with different agreements displaying asymmetric patterns illustrated by the reported contrasts; the asterisk (*) indicates relative deviance for the mismatched agreement cases below:[8]

(7) a. Tense and anaphors.
      (i) This team is promoting ?themselves
          The government has offered ?themselves / each other up for criticism.
      (ii) *This team are promoting itself
           *The government have offered itself up for criticism.
    b. (i) The committee has decided to reward themselves.
       (ii) *The committee have decided to reward itself.
    c. Tense and bound pronoun
       (i) No team$_k$ is losing its$_k$/their$_k$ way.
       (ii) No team$_k$ are losing *its$_k$/their$_k$ way.

  d. Tense twice in conjoined clauses
     (i) The group is German and are famous.
     (ii) *The group are German and is famous.
  e. Tense twice (relative/main clause)
     (i) The committee that is likely to be investigated are meeting at the moment.
     (ii) *The committee that are likely to be investigated is meeting at the moment.
  f. Tense and reflexives in conjunction
     (i) The government defended itself from the scandal and were discussed on the news.
     (ii) *The government defended themselves from the scandal and was discussed on the news.
  g. Tense and reflexives in relatives
     (i) The committee that gave itself a hefty payrise were charged for corruption.
     (ii) *The committee that gave themselves a hefty payrise was charged for corruption.

In all these cases, the predicates used can in principle apply to both the group as a whole and to the individuals comprising the group.[9] As shown, the subject allows singular agreement on T but can antecede a plural reflexive as in (7-a) and (7-b) (see, e.g., Smith, 2017 for (7-a)), or a bound pronoun as in (7-c), but not vice versa. And it can trigger both singular and plural agreements on different instances of T as in (7-g) or (7-d), or (7-f), but asymmetrically.[10] In all these cases, singular on T is what is expected under normal syntactic agreement, but plural on T appears to be with a DP that looks overall singular, as witnessed by the fact that it tolerates only singular determiners.

4. **Fourth asymmetry**
Unlike syntactic agreement, semantic agreement is subject to distributional (Sobin, 1997 and Munn, 1999) and interpretive (Sauerland and Elbourne, 2002) restrictions.

(8) a. There is/*are a northern team playing.
    b. A northern team is likely to be playing.
                 a > likely; *likely > a*
    c. A northern team are likely to be playing.
                 a > likely; *∗likely > a*
    d. LF for *∗likely > a*: [~~a northern team~~[are likely [a northern team to be playing]]]

First, example (8-a) shows that unlike syntactic agreement, semantic agreement is subject to distributional restrictions: it is unavailable in existential constructions.

Second, there are interpretive restrictions. Examples in (8-b) and (8-c) show that semantic agreement correlates with an interpretive restriction, but syntactic agreement doesn't: while singular agreement allows the raised subject *a northern team* either to have its surface scope (*there is a team and it is likely to be playing*), or to totally reconstruct (*it is likely that there is a team*

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6 In principle, we expect symmetry: singular semantic agreement should be possible requiring a singleton denotation, even of a plural marked DP–see footnote 14. And syntactic plural agreement should require a plural marked DP, but allow a singleton denotation if the content of the DP allows it: we know of no convincing case (pluralia tantum do not qualify as they do not show characteristic properties of semantic agreement).

7 Singular agreement on the head is compatible with the subject denoting an abstract entity or the collection of its members. However, in the latter case, distributive readings are (sometimes) excluded as de Vries (2015) notes (which might extend to the examples in (7)). This is illustrated by the following:

(a) The children are singing or dancing   ✓ collective; ✓ distributive
(b) The team are (all) singing or dancing   ✓ collective; ✓ distributive
(c) The team is singing or dancing   ✓ collective; ✓ *distributive

In the first two examples, some individuals could be singing, others dancing. Not so in the third. This said, replacing *or* by *and* in these examples allows this reading in all three examples, a difference that needs to be derived, possibly from Maximize Presupposition (see Section 3.3).

8 Sturt (2022) reports some degradation for examples (7-a)i, as compared to cases with uniform agreement (but substantially more for (7)ii). The (i) member of examples (7-f) and (7-g) is reported as not significantly degraded as compared to the uniform agreement cases, unlike the (ii) members.

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9 In cases in which this does not hold, the predicates trigger presuppositions interfering with agreement possibilities as in (5).

10 Thanks to Patrick Sturt for bringing some of these examples to our attention.

playing), semantic agreement disallows this latter option, i.e. total reconstruction (see Thoms, 2019, for more examples).

As Sauerland and Elbourne (2002) (in effect) and Smith (2017) and Sportiche (2016) conclude, these two restrictions can be subsumed under the following two part generalization, namely there is an LF condition on agreement and it must be Spec/Head:

(9)   Semantic agreement requires an LF Spec/Head relationship.

It should be clear why (9) blocks total reconstruction in (8-c) since total reconstruction undoes the required Spec/Head relation at LF as shown in (8-d). Generalization (9) also derives the distributional requirement. This is due to the independent observation that, in existential constructions, the DP cannot be in an LF Spec/Head relation with T. This is shown by the fact that in such constructions, the DP is scope frozen (see Heim, 1987; see Francez, 2018, for apparent counterexamples), viz.:

(10)   If there always is a soldier here... $\checkmark$ *always*/∃; *∃ > *always*

This sentence means "if it is always the case that there is a soldier here". It cannot mean "if there is a soldier who is always here". This contrasts with the ambiguous: "if a soldier is always here," which allows both readings. This means that postverbal DP cannot be the subject of the T head at LF. The distributional restriction in (8-c) then falls out of the generalization in (9), since the required Spec/Head LF relation does not hold at LF. Both parts of (9)–namely why the relation must be Spec/Head and why it must hold at LF–must be derived.[11] At the end of Section 3.4, we will see that (9) falls out from our analysis of semantic agreement.

2.1.2 Descriptive generalizations

Based on the patterns illustrated above, the following generalizations emerge about British collective nouns:

1. Semantic agreement seems to be not agreement with the ϕ-feature values of the subject DP but rather with the "collective" property of the collective noun (its mereological structure: the fact that it has multiple parts).
2. External agreement can be semantic but internal agreement can't be (*these team-sg (= these team members)).
3. The facts in (4) correlating agreement or predicate denotation and DP interpretation, that is generalization (6): (in the cases discussed) plural agreement requires a plural denotation only; with singular agreement singular denotation is available but plural denotation is also allowed.
4. The availability of non uniform simultaneous agreement, and its asymmetric behavior documented in (7), which we will refer to as **mismatched simultaneous agreement**.
5. (9)(i): Semantic agreement requires a Spec/Head relationship.
6. (9)(ii): This relationship must hold at LF

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11   Note that the general availability of semantic reconstruction (defended or adopted in various works e.g., Cresti, 1995, Rullmann, 1995, Lechner, 1998 or Bobaljik and Wurmbrand, 2012) would undermine this treatment (as well as others correlating scopal properties and binding properties), and would overgenerate. We take this as meaning that semantic reconstruction is not available (in agreement with Erlewine, 2014).

2.2 French (pseudo-)partitives patterns

Semantic agreement, also called sylleptic or *ad sensum* agreement[12] is found in quantificational or pseudo partitive constructions, or partitive constructions in French and elsewhere. Here, we provide a small sample, but the pattern of agreement we discuss is generally found with proportional quantifiers such as *deux tiers, moitié, majorité (two thirds, half, majority)*, count quantifiers such as *deux, douzaine (two, dozen)*, combining optionally or obligatorily with a determiner, e.g., *un, le, ce (a, the, this)*, followed by *de (of)* in pseudo-partitives, e.g., *groupes d'électeurs (group of voters)*, or partitives, e.g., *(les) deux tiers des étudiants ((the) two thirds of the students)*, or (*une douzaine d'entre nous (a dozen among us)*, with restrictions as to which combinations of these parts are allowed.[13]

2.2.1 Some basic cases

Pseudo-partitives like the English *a bunch of voters* are illustrated below with the quantifying noun *majorité/majority* (which could be modified by adjectives, e.g., *large, silent*, like any ordinary noun) in French which displays a richer set of agreement possibilities than English:

(11)   a.   Une majorité d' électeurs est favorable à cette réforme.
                 A majority of voters is (3^{rd}sg) in favor of this reform.
         b.   Une majorité d' électeurs sont   favorables à
                 A   majority of voters   are (3^{rd}pl) in favor   of
                 cette réforme.
                 this reform.

Partitive cases like English *a majority of the voters, two of the books* are illustrated in French below:

(12)   a.   Une majorité d'entre nous est   toujours là.
                 A   majority among us   is (3^{rd}sg) always   here.
                 "A majority of us is always here"
         b.   Une majorité d'entre nous sont   toujours là.
                 A   majority among us   are (3^{rd}pl) always   here.
         c.   Une majorité d'entre nous sommes   toujours là.
                 A   majority among us   are (1^{st}pl) always   here.

(13)   a.   Deux d'entre vous   sont   toujours là.
                 Two of   you-pl are (3^{rd}pl) always   here.
         b.   Deux d'entre vous   êtes   toujours là.
                 Two of   you-pl are (2^{nd}pl) always   here.

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12   Sylleptic agreement is robustly present in both spoken and written French. It is easily documented in corpora, on line, in print, and elsewhere; it is extensively discussed online, often with a normative angle (which, as always with normative prescriptions, only goes to further document that such data are natural), is documented in descriptive grammars such as Grevisse and Goosse (2011), p. 544 ff., and is also discussed on the website of the Académie Française, which adopts a surprisingly permissive position as to its status.

13   For example, a definite article with *majorité, moitié* is possible in a pseudo partitive only in the presence of a relative *la majorité d' électeurs *(qui est là) vient du nord/ the majority of voters *(which is here) comes from the north*. What matters for our purposes here is the existence of cases displaying this kind of agreement behavior.

Much like with collective nouns, more than one agreement option is available. In the first example (52-a), agreement is third person singular as is the head DP *une majorité/ a majority* denoting a single majority. But two more agreement options are allowed: agreement can be either third person plural as in (12-b), or first person plural as in (12-c).[14] The presence of the first person or plural element is crucial: if *nous/us* is replaced by *eux/them*, first person agreement is no longer available but plural agreement is; if *nous/us* is replaced by *la soupe/the soup*, neither first person, nor plural agreement is available.[15]

Importantly, in (12), where two plural agreement options are allowed, first person or third person, different interpretations are yielded: with first person agreement in (12-c), the speaker of the utterance is understood to belong to the majority of people who are always here; third person agreement in (12-b) is neutral (and is most felicitous if the speaker is not part of this good half). The same applies, mutatis mutandis to example (13-b) with second person.

2.2.2 Diagnostic properties

With French (pseudo-) partitives constructions, we observe asymmetries and restrictions similar to what was observed in the case of British collective nouns.

1. **Sensitivity to choice of predicate:** As in the case of collective nouns, sylleptic agreement with (pseudo-) partitives in French and English is sensitive to the choice of predicate. Predicates that do not apply to the individuals such as *s'élargir (increase)* require singular agreement as in (a). Predicates that only apply to individuals like *se moquer/make fun of* tolerate both singular and plural agreement as in (b); and neutral predicates tolerate both as in (c):

(14)   a.   Cette majorité d'électeurs s'est élargie /*se sont élargis progressivement.
              This majority of voters has/*have increased progressively.
        b.   Une majorité d'électeurs s'est moquée/se sont moqués de ce candidat.
              A majority of voters has/have made fun of this candidate.

        c.   Ce groupe d'enfants est petit / ?sont petits (this group of children is small)

In (14c), with singular agreement, either the group is small in size or the children are small in size. With plural agreement, the only reading is that the children are small in size.[16]

2. **Asymmetric dual agreement possibilities** are harder to document. The presence of two possible agreement triggers in (pseudo)-partitives makes it more difficult to evaluate which of the two controls agreement. Some are documented in Messick (2023) for English.[17] Here is an illustration with a clear contrast between the last two examples, keeping in mind that uniform agreement–both singular or both plural–is the preferred option:

(15)   a.   Une moitié de ces fleurs a été placée dans
              One half of these flowers has been placed in
              son propre vase.
              its own vase.
        b.   Une moitié de ces fleurs ont été placées
              One half of these flowers have been placed
              dans leur propre vase.
              in their own vase.
        c.   Une moitié de ces fleurs a été placée dans
              One half of these flowers has been placed in
              leur propre vase.
              their own vase.
        d.   *Une moitié de ces fleurs ont été placées
              *One half of these flowers have been placed
              dans son propre vase.
              in its own vase.

3. **Interpretive restrictions:** Paralleling the behavior of collective nouns, sylleptic agreement induces the same scopal restrictions:

(16)   a.   Une bonne moitié d'entre nous est censée être là.
              A good half of us is (3^{rd}sg) is supposed to be here.
                                          (un>censé, censé> un)
        b.   Une bonne moitié d'entre nous sont censés être là.
              A good half of us are (3^{rd}pl) supposed to be here.
                                          (un>censé, *censé>un)
        c.   Une bonne moitié d'entre nous sommes censés être là.
              A good half of us are (1^{st}pl) supposed to be here.
                                          (un>censé, *censé>un)

Semantic agreement degrades the narrow scope option. This extends to examples in (12) and (13): in (52-a), the subject can scope under *toujours/always*, but not in (12-b) or (12-c). Similarly, example (13-b) allows *always > two*, as instance of

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14   The reverse pattern is found too where the DP looks overall plural with a singular restrictor, allowing both plural and singular agreement: *Les deux tiers de l'argent iront/ira dans ce compte / (The) two thirds of the money will go (plural/ singular) into this account.* Contrast with *Les deux tiers des tartes iront/*ira dans le frigo / (The) two thirds of the pies will go (plural/ *singular) into the fridge.* This would require further discussion as here *argent* is a singular mass noun. Examples like *Deux tiers de l'argent sont/est toujours disponible(s)/ two thirds of the money are/is always available* display the interpretive restriction discussed below with singular (* *always > 2/3*), but not with plural, agreement (✓ *always > 2/3*), a diagnostic property of semantic agreement.

15   Interestingly, if we replace *la soupe* by a noun denoting a divisible object (see Wągiel, 2021) in the plural, e.g., *une bonne moitié des équipes est/sont toujours là/ a good half of the teams is/are always here*, plural agreement requires that complete teams be always here, while singular agreement allows a reading in which a good half of the members are always here, whether any complete team is present or not.

16   This is far from exhausting the whole range of data; see e.g., *Une douzaine d'enfants *est grande/sont grands (a dozen children *is/are tal)* warranting more discussion beyond what is presented here.

17   Their French counterparts are unfortunately of variable status. In addition, the interpretation of the English examples provided in Messick (2023) is most of the time not explicit, raising unanswered analytical questions that could undermine the examples' significance.

syntactic number agreement, but (13-b) with person agreement disallows *always > two*.

This can also be illustrated with certain verbs/adjectives (*manquer, nécessaire / miss, necessary*) which can outscope their subjects:

(17)   a.   Si une moitié d'entre nous est nécessaire pour le vote.
       If one half of us is (3^{rd}sg) necessary for the vote.
       (∃ > □, □ > ∃)

       b.   Si une moitié d'entre nous sont nécessaires pour le vote.
       If one half of us are (3^{rd}pl) necessary for the vote.
       *(∃ > □, *□ > ∃)*

       c.   Si une moitié d'entre nous sommes nécessaires pour le vote.
       If one half of us are (1^{st}pl) necessary for the vote.
       *(∃ > □, *□ > ∃)*

The first example is ambiguous meaning either "If there is one half of us that is necessary for the vote" or "If it is necessary for the vote that there be one half of us". This second reading is unavailable in the second and third example.

It is also possible to replace this judgment about interpretation by a judgment about well formedness. Adding the modifier *quelconque* to an indefinite yields the meaning of free choice *any*: *une moitié quelconque = any half*.[18] As such, it needs to be in an appropriate intensional context to be licensed viz.:

(18)   Une moitié quelconque *a gagné/ ✓ aurait   gagné
       Any half   *won/   ✓ would have won

Now consider:

(19)   une moitié quelconque d' entre nous ✓ aurait/
       *aurions   gagné
       Any half   of   us   ✓ would-have-sg/
       *would-have-1st-pl   won

With singular agreement, the subject can be understood in the scope of the modal and the sentence is fine. But first person plural agreement on the modal is ill-formed: indeed, this would be semantic agreement cannot reconstruct.

4. **Distributional restrictions.** Semantic agreement is unavailable in existentials. French lacks an equivalent of existential constructions to illustrate this restriction but see examples (27), (28) and (29).

We conclude that agreement possibilities in French (pseudo-) partitive constructions and in British collective nouns display the same properties: they illustrate the same phenomenon mandating the same treatment.[19]

2.3 Conjunctions

This section briefly summarizes the findings in Charnavel and Sportiche (2025), to which we refer the reader for a more detailed discussion. These findings primarily deal with Subject Verb (Subject Tense) patterns of number and person agreement in the standard SV order in French and English when the subject is a conjunction of two (or more) DPs (with obvious extensions to other cases of DP/head agreement). Here are the conclusions in Charnavel and Sportiche (2025), essentially agreeing with previous authors such as Farkaş and Zec (1995), Doron (2000), or more recently Kučerová (2018) or Harbour (2020).

1. Agreement with conjunction is necessarily semantic.
2. This is due to the absence of any feature value resolution mechanism for person and number attributing ϕ-feature values to the overall conjunction on the basis of the properties of individual conjuncts.

There are two fundamental reasons motivating these conclusions.

First, agreement is sensitive to the denotational properties of the conjunction, rather than to its syntactic make-up. This is illustrated by the following cases.

(20)   a.   Ophélie et   Julia ont bien ri.
       Ophélie and Julia have laughed a lot.
       b.   Ophélie et Julia *a bien ri.
       Ophélie and Julia *has laughed a lot.

       c.   Ophélie et Julia ont chanté ensemble.
       Ophélie and Julia have sung together.

       d.   Ophélie et Julia *a chanté ensemble.
       Ophélie and Julia *has sung together.

Sentences (20-a) and (20-c) are taken to be unsurprising: the subject is a conjunction of two singular DPs, and it is typically assumed that the conjunction is somehow resolved as syntactically plural, triggering plural agreement on the verb. Similarly, in (20-b) and (20-d), the conjunction being resolved as syntactically plural disallows singular agreement on the verb. But some observations– some from Charnavel (2010)–raise challenges for this picture.

Consider the following paradigm of conjoined singular indefinites with *un/a* or singular definites *le, la/ the*:

(21)   a.   Un/le garçon et une/la fille *a / ont dansé ensemble.   *collective*
       "A/the boy and a/the girl *has/have danced together".
       b.   Un/le garçon et une/la fille *a/ont bien ri. *distributive*
       "A/the boy and a girl/la *has/have laughed a lot".

We see that the agreement pattern is insensitive to whether the predicate is collective or distributive. But if we conjoin DPs quantified with *chaque / each* or *aucun / no*, the pattern

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changes as singular agreement becomes acceptable with distributive predicates:

(22) a. Chaque fille et chaque garçon *a/ont dansé ensemble.
          collective
          "Each girl and each boy *has/have danced together".
      b. Chaque fille et chaque garçon a/[?]ont bien ri.
          distributive
          "Each girl and each boy has/[?]have laughed a lot".

(23) a. Aucune fille ni/et aucun garçon n'*a/ont dansé ensemble.
          collective
          "No girl and no boy *has/have danced together".
      b. Aucune fille ni/et aucun garçon n'a/[?]ont bien ri.
          distributive
          "No girl and no boy has/[?]have laughed a lot".

We further observe a contrast between the following cases of conjunction of (in)definites (24) and (25):

(24) Un/Le célibataire et un/l' homme marié *a/ont bien ri.
      distributive
      "A/The bachelor and a/the married man *has/have laughed a lot".

(25) a. **Un** père dévoué et **un** collègue sympathique va/vont lire cet article.
          "A devoted father and a friendly colleague is/*are going to read this article".
      b. **Le** père dévoué que nous apprécions et **le** collègue sympathique que nous estimons tous va/vont lire cet article
          "The devoted father that we value and the friendly colleague that we all respect is/*are going to read this article".

The only difference is, again, the denotation of the conjunction of DPs. The denotation of the two conjuncts must be different in (24) since a bachelor cannot be a married man. But they can be the same in (25). And the choice of agreement correlates with the interpretation: with singular, the two conjuncts must have the same denotation. Plural agreement favors the opposite (but does not entirely require it, with an individual seen under different guises).

Second, that agreement with conjunctions is only semantic is corroborated by a diagnostic property of semantic agreement involving existential constructions:[20]

(26) a. There i. *was/ ii. were several people here
      b. There i. was / ii. *were a woman and a girl here

Example (26-b) illustrates the long-noted (see e.g., Sobin, 1997) ill-formed plural agreement with a conjunction of singulars DPs. This parallels what is observed in example (8-b) with British collective nouns. This contrasts minimally with a case in which agreement can be syntactic in

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(26-a) which displays the reverse pattern. Such contrasts supports the conclusion that agreement with conjunctions is always semantic.

2.4 Exceptional inverse specificational structures

Another distributional restriction groups together agreement with collective nouns, partitives and pseudo partitive constructions, and conjunctions, namely certain examples of "inverse specificational copular structures". In a specificational copular structure DP_1 *be* DP_2 (e.g., *The culprit is/*am me, The real problem is/*are your parents*), agreement is with DP_1. But an apparent exception to this pattern consists of cases where the initial DP is either a free relative or a relative introduced by *all* as reported in Heycock (2012, p.212, footnote 3):

(27) a. What he saw behind him was/were two men/ the surging waves.
      b. What makes something a pencil is/are (some/several) superficial characteristics.
      c. All I could see was/were (the) two/many sparkling eyes.

Plural agreement is possible in the presence of a plural DP_2 (but not of a singular DP_2), whether indefinite, definite, quantified, etc.. Now, these become deviant with plural agreement when DP_2 is headed by a collective noun, when it is a partitive or pseudo partitive construction, or when it is a conjunction (of singulars):

(28) a. All I could see was/*were a/the team.
      b. All I could see was/*were a woman and a boy.
      c. All I could see was/*were a majority of (the) senators in the hall.

This pattern can be duplicated in French for the speakers who can omit *ce* in the sentences in (29). The French analog of the specificational DP_1 *be* DP_2 normally is DP_1, *c'est* DP_2 (DP_1, *it's* DP_2) with either singular default agreement or agreement with DP_2. But in the analog of the examples in (27), *ce* can be omitted and, with a plural DP_2, singular agreement is disallowed and plural agreement is required:

(29) a. Ce qu'il voit *est/sont deux hommes/ les vagues déferlantes.
          What he saw behind him was/were two men/ the surging waves.
      b. Ce qui fait que quelque chose est un crayon *est/sont des (quelques/plusieurs) caractéristiques superficielles.
          What makes something a pencil is/are (some/several) superficial characteristics.
      c. Tout que je peux voir *est/sont (ces) deux yeux étincelants.
          All I can see is/are (these) two sparkling eyes.

In such cases, we can reproduce the pattern in (28): with a conjunction of singulars, or a singular (pseudo)-partitive with

plural restriction, plural agreement is deviant, and singular agreement is fine.

(30) a. Tout que je peux voir ?est/*sont une femme et un garçon.
All I can see is/*are a woman and a boy.
 b. Tout que je peux entendre est/*sont une moitié des instruments.
All I can hear is/*are one half of the instruments.

Interestingly, the three cases we analyze as semantic agreement (collective nouns, (pseudo-)partitives and conjunctions) pattern alike with respect to agreement, and unlike cases of syntactic agreement. How to analyze copular structures and inverse specificational copular structures is highly debated (see e.g., Heycock, 2020), and the exceptional agreement behavior of examples in (27) and (29) remains unanalyzed and beyond the scope of the present article. However, the observed pattern resembles what is found in English existential constructions where syntactic plural agreement is possible with a postverbal DP but semantic agreement is not (cf. examples (26-a) and (26-b)). The observed pattern would thus fall out if only syntactic agreement was possible in examples (27),(28), (29), and (30) but semantic agreement was not. This would fall out if the postverbal element and T are not (cannot be) in a Spec/Head configuration at LF (as some authors propose–see Heycock, 2020).[21]

3 Meaningful agreement

3.1 What needs to be accounted for

Agreement satisfies the following descriptive generalizations which should be derived:

(31) a. The Agreement–Denotation correlation (6) repeated here for the cases under discussion:
    (i) Semantic plural agreement on T (or a head) requires the subject DP to denote a plurality only.
    (ii) Singular syntactic agreement on T (or a head) requires a singular subject DP denoting a singleton or a plurality if the DP allows it.
 b. When both syntactic and semantic agreements co-occur in a given sentence, their distribution displays an asymmetric pattern.
 c. With a conjoined subject, agreement is sensitive to whether the denotation is singular or plural denoting.
 d. Semantic agreement between a head and a DP requires them to be in a Spec/Head relationship.
 e. This Spec/Head relationship must hold at LF.

We are looking for an economical treatment of these descriptive generalizations, ideally one that requires no new assumptions or stipulations.

There are a number of distinct previous proposals regarding varying agreement with British collective nouns, and a few for (pseudo)-partitive constructions, e.g., Selkirk (1977), Barker (1992), Pollard and Sag (1994), Schwarzschild (1996), den Dikken (2001), Sauerland and Elbourne (2002), Sauerland (2004), Magri (2008), Pearson (2011), Danon (2013), Sportiche (2016), Smith (2017) (similar to Smith, 2021 in relevant respects), Thoms (2019), Messick (2023), and references therein. In section 4, we discuss some of them.

Some proposals are syntax based, other semantics based or a mix.

For the syntax-based proposals, Smith (2017) convincingly critically reviews den Dikken (2001), Sauerland and Elbourne (2002), and Sauerland (2004); and fundamentally based on mismatched simultaneous agreement, Sturt (2022) convincingly critically reviews Pollard and Sag (1994) (and descendants such as Wechsler, 2011), den Dikken (2001), Sauerland and Elbourne (2002) and Smith (2017). So we will limit our discussion in section 4 to Smith (2017) and Thoms (2019) which represent two different approaches (with some remarks about Magri, 2008, in effect similar to Thoms, 2019).

For the semantics-based proposals, Pearson (2011) reviews aspects of Barker (1992), and Schwarzschild (1996), but none engages with the distributional and interpretive restrictions that are central here, so we will not discuss them.

Of all the previous treatments engaging the restrictions mentioned, all other than Sportiche (2016) are syntactic. In the Agree terminology of Chomsky (2000), a syntactic treatment of such agreements between a T head (a probe) and its DP subject (the goal G) needs the following assumptions:

1. Collective nouns or (pseudo-)partitives have two sets of number ϕ-features, say singular and plural, one for each agreement allowing a singular DP containing them to denote either a singleton (e.g., a committee) and trigger singular agreement, or a plurality (the committee members) and trigger plural agreement albeit with an apparently singular DP.
2. The T probe searches for the closest goal and agrees with its φ-features.
3. Either one of the following two analytical options for a syntactic treatment of both agreements:

   (a) the singular and plural ϕ-features on G are equidistant to the T probe; or
   (b) G is structurally ambiguous, so that under one structure singular is reachable but plural is not, and in the other plural is reachable but singular is not.

As far as we can tell, all syntactic approaches face problems with (31-b); in general, they have little to say about generalization (31-c) and none derives (rather than stipulate) generalizations (31-d) and (31-e) except for Thoms (2019). Here, we provide a (non-exhaustive) list with some basic problems they face.

Equidistance approaches (EQAPP) (Sauerland and Elbourne, 2002; Smith, 2017, 2021; Messick, 2023). They can readily deal with mismatched simultaneous agreements, but are too permissive and thus can only handle asymmetries via stipulations for some, or not at all for others.

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21   See footnote 57. But note that if the two items did turn out to be in a Spec/Head relation at LF, it would mean that generalizations (31-d) and (31-e) below are necessary but not sufficient conditions.

Structural ambiguities approaches come in two kinds:

Type 1 analyses **(SAA1)** postulate two completely independent structures, one for each agreement option operating under normal syntactic agreement rules. They go back at least to Selkirk, 1977) and include den Dikken (2001) or Sauerland (2004). They can't deal with asymmetries and mismatched simultaneous agreements.

Type 2 **(SAA2)** analyses also postulate two distinct structures that are closely related derivationally. They include Magri (2008) and Thoms (2019). They face different problems depending on the version; they can handle the facts in (8) and derive (9) in some (but not all) cases, and deal with some asymmetries, but not all of them; they cannot handle the full range of semantic agreement cases (double movement as in (41)), and overgenerate in some cases.

In addition, none of these approaches deal with semantic agreement with conjunctions. If our conclusion that such agreement is part of a unique paradigm including collective nouns and (pseudo-)partitives, they all fail.

We now present a treatment granting interpretive import features of the probe–more specifically presuppositional properties–recapitulating to some extent conclusions already reached in earlier sections.

3.2 Φ-Features and presupposition: minimal assumptions

Upon hearing out of the blue *"she was next to the bank"* without knowing anything about the context, one can make a number of inferences regarding what a truthful speaker intends to convey by uttering such a sentence. For example, one can infer that there is a unique relevant bank being talked about, or that the object denoted by *she* can be spatially located. Concentrating here on the use of the pronoun *she*, the following inferences can be made:

- the object in question is a single individual: this is because *she* is a singular pronoun.
- the object is neither the speaker, else the pronoun *I* would have been used, nor is it this speaker's addressee, else *you* would have been used.
- the object in question is an item that can be denoted by a pronoun of feminine grammatical gender. So it is not a bowling ball for example, but it could be a woman, in which case it is a person, or it could be a ship, in which case it is not.

This is all familiar. We attribute to the pronoun *she* the features and features values [3^{rd}person, -plural, +fem], and these features carry meaning, typically analyzed as presuppositions that, for a well formed sentence, lead to the inferences listed above. More generally, (ignoring gender throughout which raises its own set of issues), let's minimally postulate:[22]

(32) a. The number feature value sg(/dual)/plural on a (pro)noun triggers the presupposition that the

denotation of the minimal DP (reflexively) containing it is a singleton(/doubleton)/plurality (of greater than one cardinality).[23]

   b. The person feature value 1st(/2nd/3rd person) triggers (or possibly implicates) the presupposition that the denotation of the minimal DP (reflexively) containing it is interpreted like a first person indexical(/second person indexical but not a first person indexical / neither) (see, e.g., Schlenker, 2011 for a formal treatment).

A minimal assumption is that this is always true: whenever such features appear in a structure, they always carry these presuppositions. This minimal assumption, the null hypothesis, is widely taken to be false (albeit not in the functionalist literature): ϕ-features on probes are taken to lack interpretive import, a property sometimes seen as driving the obligatoriness of agreement (but not always, see, Deal, 2023 for recent discussion).

Is this departure from minimal assumptions a priori justified? If we think of such features affixed to T, say, as coding a property of T, it is hard to see what kind of interpretive import they could have. But this is not a necessary assumption.[24] A verb like *sleep* presupposes that its subject is capable of sleeping; it restricts the set over which the subject is allowed to range to yield well-formedness. Presuppositional items always restrict one of their arguments so properties on T could restrict the subject of T or the complement of T.

These considerations show that this minimal assumption is not a priori implausible. In full generality, this would mean:

(33) ϕ-feature values are always semantically interpreted.[25]

That syntactic and semantic agreements behave differently (e.g., asymmetrically, or with respect to distributional and interpretive properties) probably means that features on T are not always interpreted. In the discussion that follows, we show that a partial version of this null hypothesis, whereby syntactically agreeing features are not interpreted but semantic agreement features are, is predicted under minimal standard assumptions.

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23 This may have to be qualified depending on how we treat pluralia tantum, polite forms having second person singular import such as (*vous êtes/ you(2pl) are(2pl)*) or French cases such on *est ici/ lit. informal-we is here/ "we are here"* the verb *est* appears to be singular but *on* means "we". If the morphology is misleading regarding the semantic number properties of these items, this would have to be modified to accommodate these exceptions. An alternative not requiring these modifications assumes that there is no morphology/semantics mismatch. We may assume that pluralia tantum like *pants* or *scissors, glasses* do denote pluralities (that is sets of sets of individuals), a view consistent with the possibility of *a pair of pants, of scissors, of glasses,* but with the singular lacking a denotation. see footnote 52 for the case of *on, vous.*

24 This relates to the question alluded in footnote 1 in ways that can't be discussed here: the most natural assumption would be that agreement features on T head their own projection in the spine.

25 If presuppositional as in Heim (2008), each feature is a partial identity function (of type $< e, e >$) with distinct presuppositions: the presuppositions for e.g., plural is $[\![plural]\!] = \lambda x_e : x$ is a plurality. x.

See Sections 5.1 and 5.2 for discussion of person.

We now turn to why semantic agreement is found and discuss why its occurrence is predicted under minimal assumptions.

First, we assume that the Principle of Full Interpretation (FI) (Chomsky, 1986) holds: it requires every symbol present in a syntactic representation at some interface to be interpreted at this interface. Now suppose that a head T is marked with some ϕ-feature values. By FI, if these symbols are present at LF, they must be interpreted. This leads to two possible resolution paths:

- Either (as is standardly assumed in the Agree literature) the features on this head enter into a proper syntactic Agree relation with a DP (however this is technically implemented) and they (can) count as LF invisible.
- Or they are interpreted at LF.

So consider the following examples:

(34)   a.   The committee is meeting.
        b.   The committee are meeting.

In the first example, Agree holds between T and its subject and their ϕ-features match. As a result, the ϕ- features on T are made LF invisible. They have no interpretive import.

In the second example, Agree could hold between T and its subject, but their ϕ-features do not match.[26] As a result, the ϕ-features on T cannot be made LF invisible. They must, by FI, have interpretive import, namely the interpretive import they always have (as per (33)). This is semantic agreement as defined in (3).[27]

The second option, developing a suggestion made in Sportiche (2016) refined in Charnavel and Sportiche (2024), Charnavel et al. (2024), and here, is not a standard assumption, but as we will see below, this assumption derives the properties of semantic agreement. If these features are interpreted, the null hypothesis arises from the minimal assumption we outlined above: they carry their standard presupposition about what they double or enter into an agreement relation with. More specifically:

(35)   **Meaningful agreement**: In Number and Person semantic agreement between a head H and a DP as defined in (3), the ϕ features values on H impose their standard presupposition on the DP.

Consider how this applies to T and its subject DP.

When agreement is semantic, the ϕ-feature values on T and on DP do not have to match, as in the case of British collective nouns, where a singular DP cooccurs with plural agreement. What must be true is that, whatever the syntactic features of the DP are, its interpretation must be compatible with the presupposition carried

by the features on T. Importantly, the plural feature value on T does not *make* its Goal DP plurality-denoting. If the DP does not have the internal structure needed to denote a plurality, the result will be ill formed. This will be discussed to some extent in sections 5.1 and 5.2.

When agreement is syntactic agreement, the features of T and of the DP match in value, as is standard. In such a case the features on T can become LF invisible, as is also standard.

Note that, given how semantic agreement functions, the features and their values on T and DP must, in the case of semantic agreement, be generated independently of each other since they can differ. Technical questions arise regarding syntactic agreement, but the simplest implementation (with consequences and potential challenges not discussed here) would take it that with syntactic Agree, feature values on heads/probes and DPs/their goals are generated independently of each other (as in unification based frameworks). This would mean that Agree also always involves feature value matching rather than feature copying or valuing.

3.3 Remarks on Maximize Presupposition (MP)

If ϕ-features on T are presupposition triggers when agreement is semantic, we expect to see the effects of Heim's 1991 Maximize Presupposition!–henceforth MP. How exactly MP functions and how it should be implemented is unclear; see for example Percus (2006), Sauerland (2008), Singh (2011), and Schlenker (2012)–a debate which lies beyond the scope of the present article. For our present purpose, the following characterization (roughly Singh's) will suffice. Given two sentences S and S' with the same content apart from presupposition triggers, MP requires for each parallel pairs of triggers on the same scale the use of the strongest trigger whose presupposition is satisfied in the context. The use of a weaker trigger implicates that stronger triggers would yield falsehoods.

For Sauerland (2008), which deals with DP interpretation, an interpreted singular specification that requires singular denotation is more informative (stronger) than an interpreted plural specification (which allows both singular and plural denotations). If the singular was true in the context, it would have had to be used. The choice of plural implicates that the (interpreted) singular is false, so the plural ends up being plurality denoting. The behavior of collective nouns or (pseudo-)partitive constructions and agreement raises challenges for how MP functions within such a view. To see why, consider again examples such as:[28]

(36)   a.   This team is old.
        b.   This team are old.

In all syntactic treatments, the subject is marked singular in both cases, and there is a plural feature made accessible somehow

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26   More precisely here, the number features do not match but the person features may match. The minimal assumption would be that the person feature can become LF invisible but not the number feature, rather than an all or nothing option. See next footnote for why it may not matter.

27   It is unclear whether under syntactic agreement, matching ϕ-features under Agree *must* become LF invisible. If they do not have to, example (34a) would illustrate either syntactic agreement or semantic agreement, the latter with matching Spec/Head features. This systematic ambiguity would mean that no interpretive import of these features can be detected in such cases, making it difficult to decide whether this is an option.

28   Assume that singular agreement is syntactic and is not interpreted. If it can be - as we note in places although it is not required for our account - singular agreement would be ambiguous between mandating a singular interpretation and not mandating anything at all. The singular form would thus be less informative than the plural exactly as if singular on T was not interpreted: the fact that singular can be interpreted is not relevant here.

(but not visibly so in the DP) in (36-b). Note first that uninterpreted singular is less informative than plural since only the latter requires countability. Since *is* is (or can be) uninterpreted, we might expect that (36-a) cannot mean that the team members are old, since this is more informatively conveyed by (36-b) with plural marking on T. But this is incorrect: sentence (36-a) is ambiguous.

The same problem arises under our account where plural on T is interpreted as a presupposition on the subject. Plural agreement (36-b) requires a plurality denoting subject. Under the proposal in Sauerland, 2008 where plural can mean plurality or singleton denotation, this could be implicated by a singular agreement alternative with otherwise the same content. The relevant alternative is (36-a) with uninterpreted singular on T, hence not more (in fact less) informative than plural agreement in (36-b). So the subject in (36-b) should be able to denote either a plurality or a singleton. This is incorrect, which means we cannot straightforwardly adopt this proposal. We therefore assume here (see, e.g., Harbour, 2014, Mayr, 2015, Harbour, 2016, section 6.4.2, or Martí, 2020 for relevant discussion):

(37)   An interpreted plural (respectively singular) presupposition, modeled as a domain restricting identity function (see footnote 25), requires a plurality (respectively atom) denoting argument.

Given (37), interpreted singular and plural do not compete. But interpreted plural and uninterpreted singular do, plural being more informative. Since MP is motivated independently of the theory of number, the ambiguity of (36-a) is now a problem. In it, there is no maximally encoded presuppositional information guaranteeing that the subject denotes a plurality. Since (36-b) is an alternative that guarantees this meaning, the subject of (36-a) should not be able to denote a plurality. But this is incorrect.

In a syntactic approach, the form (36-a) is ambiguous as to whether the plural feature is accessible or not: it can mean *the team is old* or *the team members are old*. In (36-b), by contrast, the plural feature must be accessible, triggering plural agreement. To account for the meaning of (36-b), we need to stipulate that accessibility of this plural feature must also mean that the subject must denote the team members only (despite the presence of an interpreted singular as there is only one team) so it means *the team members are old*: as a result, the two sentences do not have the same relevant content and thus do not compete.

The same fix can be translated in our approach: assume that such a collective noun like *team* can either mean team or team members. Syntactically singular *the team* then can either mean the structure or its members.[29] This is equivalent to there being an optionally accessible plural feature in the syntactic approach, so that what the form (36-a) conveys is semantically weak: *the team or its membership is old*. In our approach, the equivalent of assuming

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that the accessible plural feature in the syntactic approach makes the subject plurality denoting derives from the assumption that T comes with a plural presupposition requiring the subject to be plurality denoting, so that it is not ambiguous (it only means *the members are old* and therefore (36-b) does not compete with (36-a).

In sum, we expect to find MP effects in cases where an interpreted (presuppositional) plural on T alternates with an uninterpreted singular on T. As we will see, such effects are found.

3.4 Deriving the generalizations

Generalization (31-a). First, given that syntactic agreement between T and its Goal DP is a purely formal operation where the features on T are not (or need not) be interpreted, it imposes no denotational restrictions on the DP. This means that singular syntactic agreement on T is compatible with the subject being plurality denoting, as long as it is syntactically marked as singular. Semantic agreement, however, does impose such restrictions, since it encodes presuppositions. Plural marking on T does require its subject to be plurality denoting. This derives generalization (31-a) (or (6)).

Generalization (31-b). Consider next how to derive the asymmetric pattern in generalization (31-b).

(7)   a.   Tense and anaphor.
              (i)   This team is promoting ?themselves.
                     The government has offered ?themselves / each other up for criticism.
              (ii)   *This team are promoting itself.
                     *The government have offered itself up for criticism.
       b.   (i)   The committee has decided to reward themselves.
              (ii)   *The committee have decided to reward itself.
       c.   Tense and bound pronoun.
              (i)   No $team_k$ is losing its_k/$their_k$ way.
              (ii)   No $team_k$ are losing *its_k/$their_k$ way.

To account for these data, we capitalize on the difference between syntactic agreement and semantic agreement. Syntactic agreement imposes no restriction on the interpretation of the subject: it may denote a singleton or a plurality, if the internal structure of the subject allows both. Semantic agreement, because it is presuppositional, does imposes denotational restrictions: a DP semantically agreeing with a plural T will have to denote a plurality.

Applying this to (7-a), in example (i), the subject antecedes a plural pronoun, which presupposes an antecedent denoting a plurality. Because the subject can denote a plurality, the result is well-formed. In example (ii), the pronoun presupposes an antecedent denoting a singleton, but the subject must denote a plurality due to the presuppositional plural features on T. This leads to deviance. The same reasoning extends to cases (7-b), and (7-c).

Note that the contrasts in (7a–c) show that anaphors or pronouns bound by the subject can mismatch the agreement on T. This casts doubts on views taking the binding of anaphors (or of pronouns) as involving the same Agree process between anaphor and antecedent as subject/verb agreement. This shows that it is

desirable to dissociate syntactic agreement or concord, which is about feature matching, from binding relations, taking the latter to involve denotational covaluation of independent expressions: for a pronoun to be bound, it suffices that its antecedent and the pronoun be covalued; that is, that they denote or range over the same entities (see Sections 5.1 and 5.2 for further discussion).[30]

Turn now to example (7-d) (tense twice in conjoined clauses):

(7-d)   (i) The group is German and are famous.
         (ii) *The group are German and is famous.

This pattern is problematic if it can only be analyzed as involving a single DP subject of a conjoined T', as in (38a) below, as it is unclear why different ordering of the conjuncts would yield the displayed asymmetry.[31] But another analysis is available as in (38b) and (38c) below whereby the second conjunct has a silent pronoun, which we assume in the non-pro-drop English and French, must be anteceded by the subject of the first one:[32]

(38)   a.   The group [[$_{T'}$ is German] and [$_{T'}$ are famous]].
        b.   [The group]$_k$ is German and e$_k$ are famous.
        c.   *[The group]$_m$ are German and e$_m$ is famous.

The contrast now reduces to that seen in (7-a), (7-b), or (7-c). These examples show that a plural agreeing collective noun headed DP cannot antecede (or bind) a singular pronoun, it can only antecede a plural pronoun. And a plural pronoun can only trigger plural agreement, and a singular pronoun can only trigger singular agreement, even when anteceded or bound by a collective noun headed DP that can trigger both agreement. This can be illustrated as:

(39)   a.   (i)   As for the committee, it is/*are old.
              (ii)   As for the committee, they are/*is old.
        b.   (i)   No team$_k$ was saying that it$_k$ {was, *were}/ *they$_k$ {was, were} winning.
              (ii)   No team$_k$ were saying that *it$_k$ {was, were}/ they$_k$ {*was, were} winning.

Now in (38), *[the group]*$_k$ can denote a plurality so e$_k$ can be plural and antecede a (silent) plural pronoun triggering plural agreement (or a singular pronoun triggering singular agreement). Given the plural features on T, *[the group]*$_m$ must denote a plurality.

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30   As a reviewer points out, this distinction between agreement and binding may partially derive Corbett (2006)'s Agreement hierarchy.

31   The same problem would arise in case of ATB movement raised by a reviewer (if ATB movement exists), where a single syntactic object occurs in three positions as in *which group$_k$ [[t$_k$ is ...] and [t$_k$ are ...]]* as a single object is not compatible with different agreements−see the discussion of (41) later in this section.

32   For reasons not discussed here, we take the reasons opposing such an analysis in Godard (1989) to be unconvincing. Note that the analysis in the text requires that subject ellipsis behave like a silent pronoun (as in Kayne, 2021, for NP ellipsis). As Richard Stockwell (personal communication) remarks, there is independent evidence for this, namely: *(i) A northern team are in the final. *A southern one are as well; (ii) Slot's team are playing well. ?*Ange's [e] aren't; (iii) Your team are playing well. ??Mine [e] aren't.* The pattern follows if (singular) *e* behaves like a silent *one*.

As such, it can only antecede a plural pronoun. But a plural pronoun cannot trigger singular agreement. Since *[the group]*$_m$ cannot antecede a (silent) singular pronoun, singular agreement on T, (7-d)b is ruled out.

Let us now turn to examples (7-e) (tense twice (relative/main clause)):

(7-e)   (i)   The committee that is likely to be investigated are meeting at the moment.
         (ii)   *The committee that are likely to be investigated is meeting at the moment.

If the relativized subject agrees in the singular as in (7-e)(i), this is syntactic agreement which imposes no restriction on the denotation of this subject DP. As a result, there is no DP internal restriction imposing any denotational restriction on the whole relative clause. In particular, it can denote a plurality, and in fact it must, given the plural agreement in the main clause. Fundamentally, this example behaves like *the committee are meeting*.

By contrast, in (7-e)(ii), plural agreement requires the relativized subject to denote a plurality. The whole relative clause must denote a plurality too. In such a case, singular agreement is excluded. But this is not derived. Something additional is needed.

Examples (7-e) form a minimal pair with examples (36) repeated below:

(36)   a.   This team is old.
        b.   This team are old.

In (36), there is no property internal to the DP *team* that makes it unambiguous and both agreements are possible. Similarly, in (7-e)(i), there is nothing internal to the DP subject that makes it unambiguous since relative clause internal agreement is singular and can therefore be syntactic; and both singular and plural agreement in the main clause are possible. But in (7-e)(ii), relative clause internal agreement is plural, semantically requiring *committee* to denote a plurality, independently of main clause agreement. As a result, in the following pair, the subject must be unambiguously plural denoting (unlike in (36)) and the two sentences without the plural presupposition expressed by the main T have the same relevant content:

(40)   a.   The committee that are likely to be investigated **are** meeting at the moment.
        b.   *The committee that are likely to be investigated **is** meeting at the moment.

Since main plural agreement triggers a stronger presupposition than (uninterpreted) singular agreement, Maximize Presupposition, as discussed in Section 3.3 is relevant: it requires the use of the stronger trigger, here plural, excluding (7-e)(ii) (= (40-b)).[33]

Turn next to example (7-f) (tense and reflexives in conjunction):

_____

33   If syntactic agreement does not require LF invisibility, singular agreement could be interpreted, requiring the subject to denote a singleton. This would exclude (7-e)ii.

(7-f) (i) The government defended itself from the scandal and
            e were discussed on the news.
       (ii) *The government defended themselves from the
            scandal and e was discussed on the news.

Again, a single DP subject of a T' conjunction as sole analysis is not possible since plural agreement would restrict it to a plurality denoting DP, incompatible with the singular reflexive. Instead, we assume that the second conjunct can have a silent pronominal subject, marked e here, anteceded in the first conjunct.

To understand this case we asked first how (α) the government defended itself from the scandal is interpreted. This can mean *the institution or its members defended the institution or themselves*. As should be clear, the singular feature on *government* is interpreted– there is only one government being talked about (see further discussion in Section 4.1.1)–but this does not mean that the denotation of the subject is a singleton. Similarly, the singular marked *itself* does not force a singular denotation on the subject or on the object, they can both denote a plurality too due to the ability of these collective nouns to come with a plurality presupposition. Expanding the structure of the pronoun *it* as a definite description with a silent NP (cf. Elbourne, 2001); this is analyzed[34] as *the government defended [the ~~government~~]self* with *government* denoting either the institution or its members. Turn now to (7-f-i). The first conjunct (reportedly) has the same meaning as (α). As a result, the silent pronoun can choose to pick out the plurality denoting option as value.

By contrast in (7-f-ii), due to the plural reflexive, a plurality denotation presupposition must be present on the subject of the first conjunct mandating a plural denotation only. It cannot mean that the institution defended its members from the scandal. This subject cannot antecede a singular pronoun (cf. *(7-a)ii) resulting in ill formedness.

The last examples (7-g) involving relative clauses, can be similarly analyzed:

(7-g) Tense and reflexives in a relative clause
       (i) The committee that gave itself a hefty payrise were
       charged for corruption.
       (ii) *The committee that gave themselves a hefty payrise
       was charged for corruption.

This discussion straightforwardly extends to the parallel cases of partitive and pseudo partitives constructions, for example, *une majorité de (/des) maisons / a majority of (the) houses*: even if their head (here *majorité/majority*) is syntactically singular, they are compatible with plural agreement if interpreted as denoting a plurality.

Finally, this account makes a correct prediction for French, which, due to its richer morphological exponence of agreement, illustrates a restriction not visible in English. Uniform agreement with two distinct heads is sometimes required (compare with (7-g) or (7-d)).

(41) a. La majorité des   soldats est ✓loyale/*loyaux.
          The majority of the soldiers is ✓loyal-sg/*loyal-pl

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b. La majorité des soldats sont *loyal(e)/✓loyaux.
    The majority of soldiers are *loyal-sg/✓loyal-pl

Here, the two heads must agree in ϕ-feature number values: both singular or both plural. Why? Agreement with the two heads is with a single moving DP. Plural marking on any head requires this DP to be interpreted as plural denoting. Now MP requires the use of the strongest trigger whose presupposition is satisfied in the context. Uninterpreted singular agreement on the other head would not maximally encode this presupposition. So plural on the other head is required too (this also applies to the case in footnote 31).

Generalization (31-c). This generalization follows from the hypothesis there is no syntactic feature resolution in conjunctions that yield ϕ-feature values for the whole conjunction. As a result, agreement with a conjunction is necessarily semantic. A conjoined subject has to satisfy the presuppositional properties of the ϕ-feature values appearing on T.

Generalizations (31-d) and (31-e). The latter, (31-e), follows from the hypothesis that the features on the probe are presuppositional in cases of semantic agreement: since presuppositions are interpretive properties they must be satisfied at LF. The former follows from general properties of presupposition satisfaction. Indeed, a presupposition trigger is a function restricting the domain over which (one of) its argument can range. That is, a presupposition trigger imposes restrictions on its sister or its subject at LF. Fundamentally, this is a subcase of the general Locality of Selection Principle or the strict locality of function/argument relations. Now T takes two arguments: a DP subject as syntactic argument and a non DP (say a VP) as complement as syntactic and semantic argument. If ϕ-features on T are presuppositional and given the nature of T and of the ϕ-features on T, the only option for these ϕ-features is to constrain the denotational possibilities of the subject of T at LF. If there is no subject e.g., due to reconstruction, the trigger is a function without argument, which is ill formed. This derives generalization (31-d).

4 Previous analyses

In this section, we discuss how some recent previous analyses mentioned in Section 3.1 deal with the agreement facts observed with collective nouns and (pseudo-)partitives. We show that in addition to facing a variety of problems, they cannot handle the person agreement facts (12) and (13) in the partitive constructions. In section 5.1, we discuss how these person agreement facts can be handled in the context of our proposal.

4.1 Collective nouns

Consider DPs headed by a collective noun such as *a team* that tolerate more than one agreement option.

First, recall that in all such cases, the nouns like *team, ...* are singular, only tolerate a singular determiner, and are interpreted as referencing a single token: a single team. This shows that the minimal DPs containing them are both morphologically and semantically singular: we cannot be dealing with a case of number ambiguity, underspecification, or uninterpreted number property for this singular noun.

The noun *team*, also allows its immediate DP container to denote not (just) the singular team entity but the plurality of its members.[35] This plural property is a lexical property of such collective nouns distinguishing them from other collective nouns (see Levin, 2001, for documented variation in this respect in several English varieties) or nouns such as, e.g., *canopy*, which reference the layer composed of the uppermost branches of the trees in a forest, a discrete set, but cannot trigger plural agreement. This lexical property also distinguishes such nouns from their cognate in other languages, e.g., French: French *une équipe / a team* also denotes an entity composed of members, with reference to these members possible (cf., *l'équipe n'a pas voté de façon unanime / the team did not vote unanimously*, where the membership is interpretively referenced) but such nouns, lacking this lexical property, do not allow plural agreement. In a syntactic approach, this property can be viewed as *team* being marked with a feature, ϕ_{plural}^{m}, call it mereological to adopt the terminology of Elbourne (1999), that encodes this possible plurality: this references the property of teams to be composed of more than one part, their members (recall that we code this property as a presupposition). What structure might such DPs containing a collective noun be like? Consider a DP such as *this team*: where is the singular/plural property of *team/teams* encoded? The standard view encodes it in a NumberP projection taking the NP *team* as complement. This feature has both morphophonological reflexes (e.g., the plural *-s* suffix), and semantic reflexes, plural for example meaning that the DP denotes a plurality of teams.

This yields the following kind of structure for the subjects of (2), i.e. for a singular (assuming *a, this*, belong to the category Determiner) where the determiners must agree in ϕ-feature values with Num, and hence are singular here:[36]

(42) $[_{DP} [_{D} \text{a/this/*these}] [_{NumP} [_{Num} \phi_{singular} [_{NP} \text{team}_{\phi_{plural}^{m}}]]]]$.

4.1.1 Equidistance approaches

Recall that equidistance approaches assume that the singular and plural ϕ-features in the goal DP are equidistant to the T probe. Under (42), an equidistance approach appears unpromising since the plural property is more deeply embedded than the singular Num part, and should therefore not be accessible to a probe.[37] One option to circumvent this equidistance problem is to modify (42) by attributing the number property $\phi_{sg/pl}$ directly to the noun *team* viewing Num as agreeing with it, instead of Num defining the number property. So the noun *team* would be both lexically specified as mereologically plural, and marked as denoting a single or a plurality of teams.[38] In effect this would replace (42) repeated below in (43-a) by (43-b):

(43)   a. *Standard : $[_{DP} [_{D} \text{a/this/*these}] [_{NumP} [_{Num} \phi_{singular} [_{NP} \text{team}_{\phi_{plural}^{m}}]]]]$

         b. ✓ Modified: $[_{DP} [_{D} \text{a/this/*these}] [_{NumP} \text{Num} [_{NP} \text{team}_{\phi_{plural}^{m}, \phi_{singular}}]]]$

The proposals in Sauerland and Elbourne (2002) or Smith (2017) are not explicit about the exact structure of collective noun headed DPs but the logic of their approach presupposes equidistance, which we can assume would be based on a structural analysis relevantly equivalent to (43-b). In effect, Sauerland and Elbourne (2002), discussed in Thoms (2009), Sportiche (2016), and Smith (2017) postulates that T agreement can either be with $\phi_{singular}$ or with ϕ_{plural}^{m} and that the latter, semantic agreement, requires a Spec/Head relationship holding at LF (exactly how this arises in this proposal does not matter here). Such an account leaves four observed asymmetries unexplained.

1. First, the determiner (or Num for that matter) cannot show plural agreement. This follows under structure (43-a): if Num is singular, under the standard assumption no access to ϕ features lower than Num is allowed from a probe higher than NumP. But it does not follow under the structure in (43-b).[39]
2. Second, the data in (4) remain unaccounted for (see below for remarks about Smith's discussion of these data).
3. Third, the asymmetry between syntactic and semantic agreement documented in (7) is unaccounted for. But we return to this point below in more detail in the discussion of Smith's proposal which does discuss this asymmetry.
4. Fourth, why semantic agreement requires a Spec/Head configuration when it normally does not (under a standard Agree/Probe/Goal construal) remains unexplained.

The proposal in Smith (2017) or Smith (2021) is quite similar to that of Sauerland and Elbourne (2002): cast in terms of the structure (43-b), it assumes that the number ϕ-feature value on the overall DP is LF-uninterpretable, unlike that of ϕ_{plural}^{m}, which is only LF-interpretable (this is similar to the index-concord distinction in

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35   And if, say, a team is composed of a single member, plural agreement is not possible.

36   As will be clear, the only aspect of such structures that matters is that the number property be higher than the *N*, a non-controversial assumption.

37   Recall also that both $\phi_{singular}$ and ϕ_{plural}^{m} are interpretable, barring a standard approach to Agree optionally targeting a particular subset of features.

38   As to why a probing T could not target *D*, say, thus blocking access to any property of the noun, it can be handled by requiring that targets need an additional property to qualify as targets, that distinguishes *N* from *D*.

39   In Hebrew, a (particular) morphologically plural noun is described as being able to have a singular denotation. In such a case, it requires singular on Num and higher (high adjectives, determiners) projections within its DP, and requires singular agreement on the verb. Landau (2016) puts forth a purely configurational analysis (syntactic agreement throughout), an analysis consistent with the fact that singular agreement on T does not show the interpretive restriction in (31-e) (thanks to Itai Bassi and Ur Shlonsky), is thus not semantic in the sense of the text. The analysis in Landau (2016) of these Hebrew facts strongly support structures like (43-a) where Num is strictly higher than *N* within a DP.

Wechsler and Zlatić, 2003). This is doubtful: both number features are equally LF interpretable. A phrase like *the team* references a single team even it denotes the plurality of its members. But we can straightforwardly recast this proposal in terms of plurality features (how many tokens are we talking about) noted ϕ here, vs mereological features (how many parts does each token have) noted ϕ^m here (it would be require altering some other features of this proposal that are not relevant here).

How does this account handle these asymmetries? The first is unaddressed. The fourth, Condition (9), is stipulated. As for the third, Smith (2017) states:

> The answer could be as simple as that CNPs *[collective NPs]* have a variable iF:|#, *[here ϕ^m_{plural}]* which is either singular or plural. For plural agreement to be possible (though not necessary), the variant that is [uF:singular, iF:plural] *[here [$\phi_{singular}$, ϕ^m_{plural}]]* is used. However, CNPs could also be specified as [uF:singular, iF:singular] *[here [$\phi_{singular}$, $\phi^m_{singular}$]]*, which could only control singular agreement. Predicates that necessarily say something about the CNP as a whole could be restricted to combining with this non-hybrid CNP variant...'

This last sentence, proposing a descriptive generalization, begs the question: if agreement is formal why should this restriction hold? This is especially puzzling given that there always is a single committee. This means that there must always be two interpretable features: one encoding that there is a single committee, and one encoding the plurality of its membership. It thus remains unclear why plural agreement is excluded (especially given mixed cases such as (7-a), which shows that a dual behavior is allowed).

Now the second point above is discussed. Recall that this is the problem raised by the asymmetry between the two agreement options illustrated by the (i)/(ii) contrasts in (7): if the relevant singular and plural feature values are equally accessible, we would expect either agreement to be in free variation which is not what is observed. A discussion of this challenge is found in Smith (2021, esp. sections 4.3 and 4.5) and other works by the same author, which basically stipulates the asymmetry as we now see. In our terms, it is cast in terms of a distinction between plurality features ($\phi_{sg/pl}$ here) involved in syntactic agreement and mereological number features (ϕ^m_{plural}) involved in semantic agreement. The account makes four assumptions:

1. ϕ^m_{plural} features can, freely, be active or not.
2. Semantic agreement with ϕ^m_{plural} features is mandatory when they are active.
3. Active ϕ^m_{plural} features may but need not be deactivated once agreement has taken place.
4. Agreement must occur as soon as possible in derivations (which, as standard, are assumed to be built bottom up).

To illustrate, in *[the team]$_k$ is/are t$_k$ proud of themselves*, *themselves* can, and therefore must under point 4, agree with *the team* upon *the team* being merged with *proud*. The plural feature on *team* can then be either deactivated, or not, yielding singular or plural agreement on T, respectively. In *the team are proud of itself*, *itself* must agree with *the team* once it is merged as subject of *proud*. The fact that agreement is singular means that there can't be an active plural feature, barring plural agreement on T.

This array of assumptions hardly counts as an explanation.[40] But even if it did, it faces empirical challenges. We will discuss a couple here and we will discuss another one below when we discuss French (pseudo-)partitives (see the discussion of example (41) on page 18). One challenge is this: the logic of this account assumes that semantic agreement must always occur derivationally prior to syntactic agreement. Indeed, assumption 4 requires agreement to take place as early as possible, and assumption 2 requires semantic agreement to be chosen if possible. If syntactic agreement occurs, no derivationally "later" semantic agreement should be allowed.

But first, it is unclear how any notion of derivational timing is involved in examples such as (7-d). In it, the agreement occurs independently in each conjunct (basically with the subject in VP in each given assumption 4), possibly followed by ATB movement if this is conjunction of T' (instead of a conjunction of TPs with a silent pronoun anteceded by the subject of the first conjunct). So at least some other assumption is needed to handle such cases.

Second, consider the following kind of involving ellipsis that display the usual agreement asymmetry:

(44)   a.   No team$_k$ [has been reported t to be unprepared] more often than they$_k$ should have been ~~reported to be unprepared~~.

        b.   *No team$_k$ [have been reported t to be unprepared] more often than it$_k$ should have been ~~reported to be unprepared~~.

Here, derivationally, the pronoun *they/it* cannot be bound before the subject has raised to the main clause, else c-command of the pronoun by the subject would not hold. The subject must raise first, probed by the main T, hence agreeing with T before the pronoun is bound. It is therefore predicted that plural agreement on T should be allowed with the subject binding the pronoun, and the reverse should be excluded: this predicts the opposite pattern from what is observed. It turns out that Smith's proposal makes similar incorrect predictions in such cases as the proposal in Thoms (2019), which we will discuss below in section 4.1.2, together with other cases of mismatched simultaneous agreement.

4.1.2 Structural ambiguities approaches

It should be clear that structural ambiguity approaches postulating two independant hierarchies, one for each structure, are in principle incapable of handling at least some of the cases of simultaneous syntactic and semantic agreement (a problem for approaches such as those of Sauerland, 2004, or den Dikken, 2001, effectively criticized in Smith, 2017 on these grounds).

But a structural ambiguity approach can arise differently [as, e.g., in Danon (2013)]. Both Magri (2008) and Thoms (2019) assume that the needed structural ambiguity is derivationally created so that two distinct structures interacting with agreement can occur within related derivations. We will discuss the account in Thoms (2019), which is very similar in spirit to Magri's but is implemented differently and engages distributional and
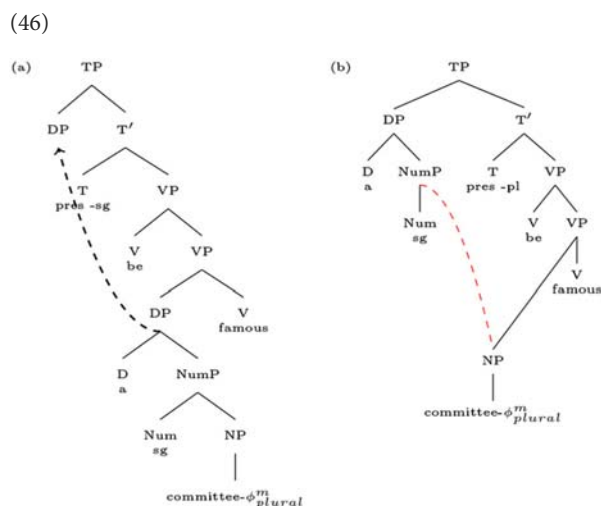
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40   The author himself discusses the *ad hoc* character of assumption 3, but aren't assumptions 1 and 2 *ad hoc* as well? The assumption about ϕ^m_{plural} being present even if inactive, rather than being either present or absent, is required because of assumptions 2 and 3.

interpretive restrictions on semantic agreement.[41] Two structures are syntactically generated (resembling those in (i) in footnote 41) as shown below (traces crossed out), with agreement standard syntactic agreement with T probing downward (as in Agree based approaches):

(45) a committee is/are famous

    a.   a committee T be [$_{VP}$ ~~a committee~~ famous]

        Standard derivation as in example (46a)

    b.   a committee T be [$_{VP}$ ~~committee~~ famous]

        via External Merge as in example (46b)

Here, *a committee is famous* can be standardly derived by merging *a committee* lower than T in VP, and have T probe its NumP, or D prior to *a committee* moving to spec, TP, as shown in (46)a.

But *a committee are famous* is derived differently by assuming the step by step derivation given below yielding structure (46b). In the first one, only singular agreement is possible, in the second plural agreement is.

(46)

Here is (46b) step by step.

1. the NP *committee* can be marked plural (ϕ^m_{plural}) and is merged with *famous* yielding [committee-ϕ^m_{plural} famous]

2. *be* and T are next merged yielding
[T [be [committee-ϕ^m_{plural} famous]]]
T probes the NP, agreeing in plural (because of ϕ^m_{plural}), yielding
[T-pl [be [committee-ϕ^m_{plural} famous]]]

3. the NP *committee* is merged with a singular Num and D (e.g., indefinite *a*) yielding: [D [Num-sg [committee-ϕ^m_{plural}]]]
(this step requires external remerge, also known as sideward movement, parallel merge, or interarboreal movement),

4. and the resulting DP is merged as spec of TP.[42] This yields the bracketed structure below illustrated in the tree in (46b) (with external remerge shown in red):
[[D-sg [Num-sg [committee-ϕ^m_{plural}]]] [T-pl [be [~~committee-ϕ^m_{plural}~~ famous]]]].

5. Note that if D-sg/ Num-sg was merged on the spine below T, T would be unable to probe lower than D/Num, and hence would have to agree in the singular.

The merits of such an approach are that:

1. it can straightforwardly accommodate: (i) why the determiner of an interpretively plural *committee* must be singular (NumP above *committee* is singular): the ϕ^m_{plural} features of *committee* are not accessible across a higher D /Num with ϕ-features); (ii) why interpretively, there is only one committee; but (iii) access by T to the ϕ^m_{plural} features of *committee* is nevertheless allowed (at a derivational point where there is no intervener);

2. it derives why semantic agreement is unavailable in existential constructions: for scopal reasons, D must merge lower than T: the intervening D or Num blocks access to the ϕ^m_{plural} features of the NP;

3. it derives why a semantically agreeing DP cannot reconstruct lower than T; that is why the D of this DP cannot be interpreted low: in a movement relation from a low position to a higher position, reconstruction arises by failing to interpret the high copy and only interpreting a low copy. But there is no low copy of the full DP with semantic agreement, since the D never was lower than T when such agreement takes place: total reconstruction of the DP is not possible.

This said, a number of questions arise which we examine in turn.

1. How are such structures as (45-b)/(46b) interpreted and can generalization (6) be derived?

2. How are the mismatched simultaneous agreement data handled?

3. How is person agreement in partitives handled?

These questions are interrelated.

Interpretation: Begin with how such structures as (45-b)/(46b) are interpreted? Thoms (2019) is not

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41 Magri (2008) follows Barker (1998) in assuming that collective nouns can always involve a possibly covert PP complement so that *a committee* referring to a committee of students can always structurally be *a committee of students*. This gains some plausibility from the fact that French allows plural agreement with (some) singular collective nouns when they are overtly complemented by a plural. Now in this proposal, a sentence like *a committee is/are famous* can have two representations, with the subject having a VP internal trace as indicated:

i. a committee is/are famous

    a.   a committee *of students* be [$_{VP}$ *students* famous]]]

    b.   a committee *of students* be [$_{VP}$ *committee of students* famous]]]

where, with say T probing down for agreement, the first one licenses plural agreement on T, the second singular agreement. Magri mentions that there could be different ways in which this is achieved. The specific implementation chosen is as follows: Magri modifies Fox (1999)'s trace conversion rule allowing deleting trace material to yield (ia) above, and needs an interpretive rule (the exact rule is not given) that would yield the meaning "a committee of students is such that the students are famous". Such an approach is very similar to Thoms's account, which will be discussed below and faces many of the same problems, but it may not face the same problems with respect to interpretation.

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42 Thoms (2019)'s treatment is cast with agreement holding under an Agree type relation, with the Probe c-commanding the Goal. But this is not necessary. Thus in the above, plural agreement could take place after the NP *team* raises to spec, TP. This NP could then externally merge with Num and D, prior to remerging to the spine. This could remove the objection based on example (44).

explicit about this,[43] so let us examine some interpretive boundary conditions.

1. First, in (45-b), the bare NP is the argument of the adjective *famous* so we must assume that bare NPs (as well as DPs) can introduce individual denotations.[44]

2. Second, externally merging material with this NP and remerging the result (a DP) into the spine must yield an interpretable structure. In the present case, this raises no particular problem as a structure such as (45-b) would end up meaning *a committee is a committee which is famous*. More generally, the material externally merged to the NP cannot be such that it requires an independent θ-role, at least in sentences similar to (45) as there is none available.[45] In general, externally merging expressions quantifying over the set denoted by the NP will be well formed. Indeed, part of the meaning of $[[_{XP} ..NP_k] \text{ T } [_{VP} t_k \text{ V}]]$ entails that $[\![XP]\!] \in [\![NP]\!] \cap [\![V]\!]$, which is going to be interpretable only if $[\![XP]\!] \subseteq [\![NP]\!]$. This will become relevant later.

3. To derive (6), a first option is to make NP *committee* plural (to license plural agreement) and only denote the committee members: this would tie together plural agreement and plural interpretation. But if the bare noun *committee* were only a plural denoting some people (the committee members), some meaning would have to be derivationally added covertly so that the abstract entity is referenced when agreement is singular. Now covertly shifting the meaning from "a set of people" to the abstract entity "committee" not only is rather far fetched, but it would also not yield a well-formed interpretation as it introduces a new kind of individual (the structure) in need of an independent θ-role: roughly, *this committee are famous* would translate as *this structure is (its) members who are famous* which is non sensical as a committee–the abstract structure–is not included in the set of its members. But all expressions such as *the (new)* committee, *three* voters, *a majority of* members, *a majority of the* members, *a bunch of* students, *a bunch of students among these* students, where the italicized material is merged after agreement, will yield well-formed outputs. As we will see when we discuss agreement in (pseudo-)partitives cases, this makes incorrect predictions.

4. A second option is to assume that no meaning is derivationally added but to assume lexical ambiguity: *committee₁* would mean the property of being such an abstract entity and be formally marked singular (triggering singular agreement), and *committee₂* would mean committee parts and would be formally marked plural (triggering plural agreement). This stipulates the correlation between meaning and agreement. In addition, a serious difficulty is why *committee₂* is allowed to combine with singular Number and Determiners. This *syntactic* problem can of course be stipulated away, but a more principled conclusion is that this is simply not what is going on.

At any rate, we are led to conclude that a collective noun like *committee* qua argument can either mean the structure or its members and is marked plural in the latter case. In effect, this stipulates the relation between agreement and meaning: this means that under this proposal, (6) is independently required but underived. By contrast, the presuppositional approach we propose derives (6) independently of the particular syntactic derivation advocated in Thoms (2019), as well as the other descriptive generalizations. We conclude Thoms (2019)'s approach is not needed.

Mismatched agreements Turning now to mismatched simultaneous agreement cases, the Magri-Thoms treatments suffer from the same shortcoming Smith's treatment suffers from. Because, in simple cases, they tie semantic agreement with an XP to this XP being a trace, they predict that semantic agreement with a given item should always derivationally precede the possibility for syntactic agreement with (a container of) this item. Cases like (44) are problematic. And so are asymmetric cases where there is no derivational connections between syntactic and semantic agreement, e.g., cases such as (7-d) or (7-f).

Particularly difficult cases are those in (7-g) repeated below:

(7-g) (i) The committee that is likely to be investigated are meeting at the moment.
(ii) *The committee that are likely to be investigated is meeting at the moment.

Here on a syntactic derivation alone, we would expect the second example to be fine: semantic agreement in the relative clause does not preclude the head from being singular, once it has been (re)merged above T in the relative clause, and relativized, licensing main clause singular agreement. We also expect the first example to be well formed, the relative clause *committee that is likely to be investigated* being merged below T, externally merged with the rest of the DP containing it, and the resulting DP merged above T. More generally, allowing external remerge overgenerates, predicting for example that in stacked relatives clauses, any pattern of agreement is possible, for example:

(47) the $[_{R2} [_{R1}$ committee that is/are corrupt] that is/are famous] is/are here.

The reason is that nothing prevents externally remerging a bare NP *committee* in a relative clause: *committee → committee that is/are corrupt*, and relativizing again *committee that is/are corrupt*

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44 We will continue calling these constituents bare NPs, but such NPs need not be bare; there could be some functional structure as long as Num or D have not been merged. Taking bare NPs to be individual denoting is not standard but it can be done, e.g., by taking NPs to denote variables restricted by the NP content. This requires changing the logical types of D's and Q's, see e.g., Heim (1997) for steps in this direction.

45 But this is not generally true, which causes problems for theories allowing External Merge. The original motivation for External Merge is the movement theory of obligatory control where movement is to a θ-position. Thus consider the following derivation: *The brother of John wants ~~John~~ to leave*, with *the brother of* externally merged to *John*, and spelled out *The brother of John wants to leave*. This string should be able to mean: the brother of John wants John to leave, obviously an undesirable result that must be prevented.

→ *[committee that is/are corrupt] that is/are famous at the moment*, picking up any agreement in either clause, before remerging on the spine, independently of the agreement choice in the main clause.

But granting (6) can derive the facts (as discussed in section 3.4): in (ii) given plural agreement in the relative clause, the head of the relative must mean the members of the committee blocking singular agreement in the main clause; in (i) the NP *committee that is likely to be investigated* has the same mereological structure as the NP *committee*: this does not rule a plural denoting construal of the subject, licensing plural agreement in the main clause. With stacked relatives, embedded singular agreement does not preclude plural agreement higher. But semantic plural agreement somewhere requires plural agreement higher, which is in line with speakers' intuitions:

(48)   a.   The $[_{R^2} [_{R^1}$ committee that is corrupt] that is famous] is/are here.

        b.   The $[_{R^2} [_{R^1}$ committee that are corrupt] that *is/are famous] *is/✓ are here.

        c.   The $[_{R^2} [_{R^1}$ committee that is corrupt] that are famous] *is/✓ are here.

Finally another type of case in which the (Magri-)Thoms proposals [as well as the proposal in Smith (2017)] overgenerate is (41) discussed earlier. These proposals all wrongly predict that (semantic) plural agreement on the lower head and (syntactic) singular agreement on the higher one is well formed. This is incorrect: the two heads must agree in ϕ-feature number values (viz. *la majorité des soldats est loyaux* in (41)a).

4.2 (Pseudo-) partitives

Superficially, in a French or English pseudo-partitive or partitive construction, such as *a majority of (the) girls*, agreement can be either with the quantity noun *majority* or with it domain of quantification *(the) girls*. Agreement with the latter is exclusively semantic, displaying different properties than agreement with the former, which is, or can be syntactic.

The structure of quantificational/ pseudo partitive/partitive cases is substantially debated (see, e.g., Falco and Zamparelli, 2019, and references therein) but the details of the debates mostly do not impact what is relevant here. Nouns like *majorité, moitié, ../ majority, half* in French are lexically unmarked for number and can appear in the singular or the plural coded in their NumP, with this number property phonologically and semantically interpreted.
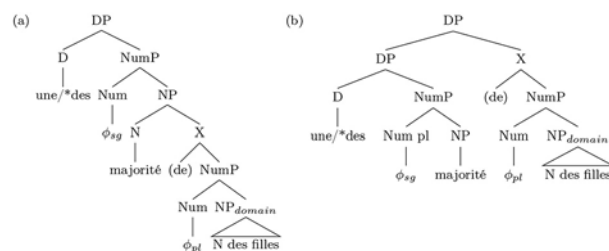
A pseudo-partitive case like *une majorité de filles/ a majority of girls*, which allow singular or plural agreement, can, a priori, be analyzed as one of the two options (49a,b) (assuming *une, des/ a, indefinite plural*, belong to the category Determiner), one right branching only, the other not:

(49)   a. $[_{DP} [_D$ une/*des] $[_{NumP} [_{Num} \phi_{singular} [_{NP}$ majorité [de ... $[_{NPdomain}$ filles]]]]]

        b. $[_{DP} [_{DP} [_D$ une/*des] $[_{NumP} [_{Num} \phi_{singular} [_{NP}$ majorité]]]] [de ... $[_{NPdomain}$ filles]]

A partitive part/whole structure is roughly assumed to be built on a pseudo partitive structure: *a majority of the girls* is treated in effect as *a majority of N of the girls*, or *two of the girls* as *two N of the girls*, where the deleted head may be the same noun as that denoting the whole (here *books*) or something less specified compatible with its denotation.[46] This yields two options for partitives like *une majorité des filles/ a majority of the girls*:

(50)   a. $[_{DP} [_D$ une/*des] $[_{NumP} [_{Num} \phi_{singular} [_{NP}$ majorité $[_{(of) NP_{DOMAIN}}$ N des filles]]]]].

        b. $[_{DP} [_{DP} [_D$ une/*des] $[_{NumP} [_{Num} \phi_{singular} [_{NP}$ majorité]]]] [of $[_{NumP}$ Num $[_{NP_{DOMAIN}}$ N des filles]]]].

For (pseudo-) partitives with numerals like *two of the books*, we can, for our purposes here assume a simpler structure as what matters is that only the singular or plural Number property of the overall DP matters and is the only one syntactically accessible (but cf. Danon, 2012 for discussion):

(51) $[_{DP} [_D$ e $[_{NumP}$ two $[_{Num} \phi_{plural} [_{(of) NP_{domain}}$ ... N des filles]]]]].

Postulating a structural ambiguity in connection with agreement and other facts goes back at least to Selkirk (1977). Selkirk's 1977 proposal is based on the observations in (a, b, c):

(52)   a.   Number agreement:
              A bunch of those flowers {was/were} thrown out on the back lawn

        b.   Pronominalization:
              A bunch of those flowers could be put in the vase, couldn't they/it?

        c.   Selectional restrictions:
              She {broke/drank} a bottle of that good wine.

        d.   Elle a bu, puis cassé la bouteille de vin.
              She drank, then broke a bottle of wine.

        e.   La bouteille de vin, elle l'a bue avant de la casser.
              The bottle of wine, she drank it before breaking it.

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46   Authors differ as exactly what this *N* can be, ranging from being the same as the one denoting the whole for some, to a Noun meaning 'part (of)' for example, see again for discussion Falco and Zamparelli, 2019, and the whole journal volume containing it, devoted to partitives.

    f.   Elle a bu la petite bouteille sucrée.
        She drank the small sugared bottle.

    g.   Une large majorité silencieuse d'électeurs s'est constituée / se sont finalement exprimés.
        A large silent majority of voters arose/ finally expressed themselves

The reasoning is that selectional restrictions in (52c) indicate that the head of *a bottle of wine* is *bottle* with *break*, vs. *wine* with *drink*, with this structural ambiguity taken to feed the agreement differences in (52a) and (52b). But note that (52d) is fine, with *bouteille de vin* a shared constituent, regardless of how this RNR structure is analyzed (be it a truly shared constituent, or backwards ellipsis, as in Barros and Vicente, 2011). Example (52e) makes the same point. Example (52f) where the noun *bottle* appears to be modified by an adjective modifying its size, and another qualifying its content shows that a structural ambiguity approach is at best unnecessary, as Danon (2013) concludes. The facts in (52b) reproduce the behavior of of pronominal binding vs verbal agreement and are not telling.[47]

Now if both the (52a) and (52b) structures above are available or the second member of each pair is, the quantity noun and the domain constituent would be equally accessible to an outside probe, consistent with either structural ambiguity approaches or equidistance approaches. But this is an undesirable result since it would predict identical behavior for the two agreement possibilities. This means that only structures (52a) should be available. General phrase structure theoretic principles a priori favor the (52a) member of each pair, as in (52b) member, the overall DP is not headed (as surely X is not a D), and some additional mechanism must be provided to explain why such structures are, say, definite or indefinite depending only on the choice of an embedded D or why standard syntactic agreement is always consistent with this choice of D. Furthermore, there is crosslinguistic evidence supporting the idea that only the (52a) structural analysis is available, discussed in Danon (2013) which concludes (specifically for Hebrew, but surveying a variety of languages) that there is no such structural ambiguity.

Note finally examples such as (52g) where the noun *majorité/majority* is simultaneously modified by *large*, relating to the its quantity meaning, and by *silent*, related to a property of its members: this indicates that a structural ambiguity based on the quantifier being either purely quantifying or referencing an abstract entity of a certain size, would be insufficient.

We conclude that a single structure underlies these (pseudo-) partitive constructions, namely the (52a) member of the pairs above.

This means that structural ambiguity approaches of type 1 (SAA1) based on different hierarchical organizations for each agreement option is not available.

How about equidistance approaches? To treat varying agreement, Danon (2013) postulates an upward feature percolation mechanism whereby the low plural property can percolate up

to become available for DP external agreement (so in (50-a) for example, ϕ_{pl} in X can percolate up to Num of *majority*). This is an SAA1 approach based not on different hierarchies but on different content. Danon (2013) does not address mismatched simultaneous agreement, but Messick (2023), who adopts this percolation mechanism and reports mismatched simultaneous agreement for English,[48] does. Messick's treatment is quite similar to Smith's, using two sets of features (as in Wechsler and Zlatić, 2003) but with some differences: it assumes that anaphor–antecedent agreement involves feature agreement just like in Smith's proposal, but such agreement is countercyclic: it applies after T agrees with its subject. In addition, it stipulates a Constraint on Agreement with Semantic Features (CASF) stating that 'once semantic features have been accessed for an agreement operation, all other subsequent agreement operations must target the semantic features'. The conjunction of these assumptions derives some of the data in (7), e.g., (7-a), (7-b) or (7-c). For example, *the committee are proud of itself* is out because plural agreement on T is semantic, and by CASF, subsequent agreement between the subject and the anaphor must be semantic too.

But such a treatment fails on a number of points. First, it cannot handle any of cross sentential asymmetries which only involve two T agreements without derivational connections, e.g., (7-d), (7-f) (and perhaps also (7-e) and (7-g) although this depends on further assumptions not discussed in Messick, 2023). It is unclear what exactly the distinction between syntactic and semantic features is, since, as repeatedly stressed, the syntactic number features are interpreted. It is also unclear why CASF should hold at all, or why this constraint applies to semantic features rather to syntactic features. It requires countercyclicity for antecedent/anaphor agreement. And it is unclear how countercyclic agreement applies in the case of bound pronouns, which can be indefinitely distant from their antecedent, (cf. e.g., **No team$_k$ are proud of the results (the news report) it$_k$ got*) can be treated unless Agree is an unbounded relation.[49] It cannot handle the French data in (41): an example like *La majorité des électeurs sont loyale / the majority of the voters are loyal-sg* should be OK since low agreement with the adjective would be syntactic, high agreement semantic, consistent with CASF. And, since in the end, semantic agreement is treated as syntactic agreement with semantic features, it says nothing about distributional and interpretive restrictions in (16) or (30-b).

Finally, the Magri-Thoms approach to collective nouns does generalize straightforwardly to (pseudo-)partitives: the sortal NP *voters* is merged as argument of *voted*, and *a majority of* is added later, appearing on the spine only above T.

Consider now (12) and (13), repeated below:

(12)   a.   Une majorité d'entre nous est   toujours là.
           A   majority among us   is (3^{rd}sg) always   here.
           'A majority of us is always here'.

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[47] A more complete paradigm includes the following, consistent with what has already been discussed:

(i) ?A bunch of these flowers was put in the vase, weren't they?

(ii) *A bunch of these flowers were put in the vase, wasn't it?

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[48] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this work we did not know about.

[49] Countercyclicity seems not essential to this account: both of these problems disappear if binder/bindee relations are not handled via Agree(ment) but simply require possible covaluation, as we argue.

b. Une majorité d'entre nous sont   toujours là.
A   majority among us   are (3^{rd}pl) always   here.

c. Une majorité d'entre nous sommes   toujours là.
A   majority among us   are (1^{st}pl) always   here.

(13)   a. Deux d'entre vous   sont   toujours là.
Two of   you-pl are (3^{rd}pl) always   here.

b. Deux d'entre vous   êtes   toujours là.
Two of   you-pl are (2^{nd}pl) always   here.

In these examples, what is agreement with? Could it be with the DP denoting the whole? If this was the case, we could explain why we get first or second person agreement in the presence of *nous, vous /us, you-pl*. To explain the possibility of third person agreement, we would have to assume that *nous/us* is actually composed of a first person head above a plural pronoun: *nous/us* = [1st pers [eux/them]], not an implausible assumption. Agreement in the third person plural would come about if only *eux/them* was merged lower that T and everything else in the subject DP above T in the spine.

This approach, however, makes incorrect predictions.

First, if plural agreement is only (somehow) syntactically linked to the features of the pronouns *nous, vous, eux / us, you-pl, them*, this predicts that what occurs above these pronouns in the DP is irrelevant. But this prediction is false. Thus, there is a minimal contrast between the following two sentences. Consider:

(53)   a. (l')Un d'entre nous/vous/eux
One of   us/you-pl/them
est/*sont/*sommes   toujours là.
is-3^{rd}sg/are-3^{rd}pl/are-1^{st}pl always   here

b. Deux d'entre nous/vous/eux
Two of   us/you-pl/them
*est/sont/sommes/êtes   toujours là.
is/are-3^{rd}pl/(are-1^{st}pl/2^{nd}pl always   here
1st (resp. 2nd) person agreement only with *nous/us*
(resp. with *vous/you-plural*)

In (53a), the subject DP denotes a singleton due to the presence of the numeral/indefinite article *un* and plural agreement is excluded. In (53b), with the numeral *deux/two*, plural agreement is allowed. The cardinality of the denotation of the whole subject matters. Even worse, there are cases in which the quantity restriction is, in principle, compatible with plural agreement, but plural agreement fails if the DP denotes a singleton:[50]

(54)   Une moitié de nous deux est/*sont/*sommes ici.
One half of us two is/*are/are-1P here.

Here, the sortal NP is plural, and *one half* normally allows plural agreement with plural sortal NPs, but the overall denotation is singular because it is one half of two. This falls out under a semantic agreement approach, but seems out of reach of syntactic approaches.

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50   This generalizes in obvious ways that are difficult to handle under any syntactic approach. Judgments become less clear as cases become more complex (predictably, but for reasons beyond the scope of this note).

Secondly, under such a derivation, the argument of the verbal predicate is the DP denoting the whole, not the DP denoting the relevant part of the whole. This yields incorrect results: it would treat (i) a majority of us are sick as meaning (ii) a majority of us is us who are sick that is, a majority of a group including the speaker is a group including the speaker who are sick. However, (i) can be true and (ii) false if the sick majority of us does not include the speaker. But such an agreement cannot be prevented under Thoms's proposal: it suffices to merge *nous* low, and everything else (namely, *une majorité d'entre*) above T. So this proposal overgenerates.

One conclusion emerging from this discussion of person agreement is the following: if agreement is syntactically with anything, it can only be with the constituent denoting the sortal NP, namely, what codes the domain of quantification marked NP$_{domain}$ in structures (49-a), (49-b), (50-a), (50-b). We discuss how person agreement can be handled in Section 5.1.

4.3 Conclusion

Overall, the Magri–Thoms structural ambiguity treatments are substantially more successful than the equidistance approaches or the other structural ambiguity approaches. But they face serious difficulties (and, in Thoms's version, requires the availability of External Merge which overgenerates): namely, they require stipulating (6), they cannot handle the agreement data in more complex cases such as some mismatched simultaneous cases, or agreement with two heads under movement as (41), and they cannot handle person agreement in French partitive constructions. If generalization (6), or whatever derives it, is all that is needed, as we argue in Section 3, the structural ambiguity they postulate, together with the added assumptions to make it possible, is unnecessary.

5 Handling person agreement

In this section, we deal with two issues relating to person agreement: how person agreement is possible with partitives and why person agreement is (in general) not possible with non-pronouns.

5.1 Person agreement in partitives

At the end of section 4.2, we reached the following conclusion: in examples (49-a), (49-b), (50-a), (50-b), if agreement could syntactically be with anything, it could only be with the constituent denoting the sortal NP, namely what codes the domain of quantification marked NP$_{domain}$ in structures (49-a), (49-b), (50-a), (50-b).

Our analysis is that agreement is semantic since this NP is too deeply embedded to be accessible to syntactic agreement. But how is the right denotation delivered in a way consistent with the presupposition of the ϕ-feature values on T, e.g., when it carries

first or second person values? More specifically, consider again an example such as

(55)   [$_{DP*}$ une moitié de nous six] est/sont/sommes là.
        [$_{DP*}$ one half   of us   six] is/are-3pl/are-1pl here.

Recall that the different agreements yield different meanings: *sommes* requires the half to include the speaker, *sont* requires the half to be larger than one (so is out with nous *deux/us two*), and *est* is neutral. How exactly does the well-formedness of (55) with 1pl or 3pl agreement come about? First, we analyze *nous (us)* as person marked pronoun (cf. Postal, 1969, Elbourne, 2001): it includes the definite article, Number, first person (1p), and a silent NP. When T is 1p, either DP* is 1p, in which case the presupposition on T is trivially satisfied (as with *we*), or DP* is compatible with 1p: in this case, it denotes a set of individuals including the speaker. But if the latter, it should make no difference if *nous six (us six)* is replaced, e.g., by *the men* as long as the speaker is a man (the 1pl presupposition would be met since the set of men includes the speaker). However, the result is deviant:

(56)   une moitié des hommes sont/*sommes ...
        one half of the men are-3pl/*are-1pl)) ...

What then allows (plural and) person agreement in (55)? The presence of *nous (us)* is crucial but it can't be just *nous (us)*: in cases such as *un de nous deux (one of us)*, neither plural not person agreement is allowed (see (58-a)); similarly in *une moitié de nous deux (one half of us two)*. To tackle this question, we have to take into account the syntactic analysis of partitives. Now this partitive subject is analyzed as shown in (50):

(57)   a. [une moitié [$_X$ [$_{NP*}$ e [de [nous six]]]]
            [one half   [$_X$ [$_{NP*}$ e [of [us   six]]]]
        b. [$_{DP*}$ une moitié [$_{X*}$ 1pl [$_{NP*}$ e [de [the [$_{X**}$ 1pl [$_{NP**}$ person]]]]]]].

where the silent X* is anaphoric on X**, a subconstituent of *nous /us*. Since the overall DP is third person singular, it must be X* that encodes 1p and pl. This means, as argued in Harbour (2014), Mayr (2015), Harbour (2016) and Ackema and Neeleman (2018) but not in Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002), person is coded at the NP level (within X), not at the DP level. And in the present case, the denotation of DP* is consistent with the presupposition imposed by T.

Now *une moitié de nous deux sont (one half of us two are...)* is correctly excluded because the plural presupposition on NP* conflicts with the overall denotation of DP* (which is a singleton). But why is the following example excluded?

(58)   a. un de nous six est/*suis ..
            one of us   six is/*am   ..
        b. DP*=
            [un [$_{X*}$ 1sg [$_{NP*}$ e [de [the [$_{X**}$ 1pl [$_{NP**}$ person]]]]]]]

Here, DP* would denote a single individual: since X* could be 1sg, 1sg agreement on T should be well formed. This means that there must be a restriction preventing X* from being 1sg here. If X** is structured as [1person [plural NP]] (as in Harbour, 2016),

it does not contain a constituent X*=[1person [singular NP]] could be anaphoric on.[51]

It may also be related to a more general phenomenon, also illustrated by the ill-formedness of (56), namely the cases discussed in the next section of definite descriptions (imposters) picking out the speaker, but incompatible with person agreement on T (see footnote 55) or prohibited from binding first person pronouns.

In sum, to handle agreement in the cases discussed in this section, we conclude in agreement with Harbour, 2014, Mayr, 2015, Harbour (2016) and Ackema and Neeleman (2018) that the person property of pronominal DP is not a high property within these DPs but rather a low property of NPs. This means that person presuppositions should be reformulated as applying to NPs.

5.2 Person agreement with non-pronouns

A reviewer (rightly) wonders why the following kind of examples, some involving imposters or camouflage in the sense of Collins and Postal (2012), are consistently ill-formed with first person agreement:

(59)   a. Jack est/*suis malade.
            Jack is/*am sick (even if uttered by Jack).
        b. Papa est/*suis malade.
            Daddy is/*am sick (uttered by a father to his child).
        c. Le présent intervenant/votre humble serviteur/– –
            est/*suis prêt.
            The present speaker/your humble servant/yours truly
            is/*am ready.

In this section, we consider this question and some connected issues, briefly outlining why we think these facts (and some others) are compatible with our general approach. Needless to say, this brief discussion cannot do justice to the relevant array of intricate data connecting the internal syntactic structure of such expressions (cross-linguistically), the semantic analysis of person features, how they are interpreted, and how their interpretation connects in detail with agreement and binding, nor to the proposals in Podobryaev (2017) addressing some of these questions. Some of this is discussed in more detail in Charnavel et al. (2025).

Note first that it is not clear whether the restriction in (59) is a general property or whether it is subject to language variation and, if so, what this variation correlates with. The relevant literature discusses imposters or so called "unagreement" configurations where, for example, subject definite descriptions *seem* compatible with first person agreement and are understood to include the speaker in their denotations (see, e.g., Collins, 2014, Höhn, 2016, Ackema and Neeleman, 2018), but there is no consensus on how to analyze these data (in particular syntactically).

Limiting ourselves to English (as standardly reported) and French (as we have found it from our survey of speakers), let us

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51 Note that third person plural agreement is possible since X*=[pl NP] could be anaphoric on the inner constituent of X**=[1person [plural NP]].

grant the standard answer that the subjects in (59) are not (and perhaps cannot be) morphosyntactically first person (therefore cannot trigger first person agreement under a syntactic approach). In our approach, this translates to these imposters (or definite descriptions such as in (56)) not being compatible with the first person presupposition imposed by T. If there turned out not to be real variation, we would want to explain why such elements cannot be marked first person or meet a first person presupposition. Under either approach, since first person is interpreted, this suggests that first person interpretation/presupposition is stronger than requiring reference to the speaker (see footnote 55 for some speculative remarks).

But this issue is complicated by (at least) two factors (and many more ignored here, given the reported cross-linguistic variation, e.g., in Collins, 2014).

First, some imposters can trigger person agreement. Recall the plural of "politeness" in French where a single addressee can be addressed by a form identical to the second person plural pronoun with concomitant agreement: *Vous êtes là (you-2pl-polite are-2pl there)*.[52] Now, French expressions of deference such as *Votre Altesse (Highness), Éminence (Eminence), Excellence (Excellency), Grâce (Grace), Majesté (Majesty), Seigneurie (Lord)* allow both third person agreement and polite agreement:

(60) a. Votre Majesté/ Excellence est souvent critiquée
          your Majesty/ Excellency is often criticized
          pour ses idées.
          for her-3sg ideas.

      b. Votre Majesté/ Excellence êtes souvent critiquée
          your Majesty/ Excellency are-2pl often criticized
          pour vos idées.
          for your-2pl ideas.

Prescription requires third person agreement, but many speakers (all we consulted) allow polite agreement here[53] contrasting with the French equivalents of examples in (59) which are sharply out with first person agreement. The existence of such cases underscores the fact that there is no organic prohibition of semantic agreement with imposters.

The behavior of these imposters can be captured by assuming that such expressions are morphosyntactically singular but can have a second person presupposition. This correctly predicts the usual pattern of mismatched simultaneous agreement seen earlier. In the examples below, matching agreement between T and the pronoun (*her/your*) is preferred, but mismatches follow the pattern we have already encountered (with number): replacing *ses / her* by *vos / your* is relatively acceptable in (61-a), but the other switch in (61-b) is unacceptable.[54]

(61) a. ?Votre Majesté/ Excellence est souvent critiquée
          your Majesty/ Excellency is often criticized
          pour vos idées.
          for your-2pl ideas.

      b. *Votre Majesté/ votre Excellence êtes souvent
          your Majesty/ your Excellency are-2pl often
          critiquée pour ses idées.
          criticized for her-3sg ideas.

Naturally, it would be desirable to understand whether this difference between first and second person, be it handled syntactically or in our terms, is accidental, and if not, why it holds. More cross-linguistic research is needed to answer this question.

Second, there is at least some asymmetry between singular and plural exemplified here with first person singular and first person plural binding possibilities documented in Collins and Postal (2012) and in Podobryaev (2017) (and is also reported for some languages in Collins, 2014) and illustrated below–a child is addressed by her father for the first two):

(62) a. *Only Daddy$_k$ thinks that I$_k$ should get ready.
      b. Only Daddy$_k$ and Mommy$_m$ think that we$_{k+m}$ should get ready.
      c. Of all of your ex-husbands, only your faithful servant$_m$ thinks that our$_{m+k}$ marriage was successful (spoken to an ex-wife$_k$).   *with partial binding*

Covaluation is out in the first example but it is fine in the second (where binding negates the alternatives: nobody else thinks they should get ready) and the third. And this asymmetry extends to agreement (some of this is noted in Collins and Postal, 2012):

(63) a. Votre humble serviteur est/**suis déjà là.
          your humble servant is/**am already here.

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b. Vos humbles serviteurs sont/$^{??}$sommes tous ici.
   your humble servants are-3pl/$^{??}$are-1pl all here.

c. Votre humble serviteur et son assistant
   your humble servant and his assistant
   sont/sommes ici.
   are-3pl/are1pl here.

This cannot be due to a difference between the singular *your humble servant* and its plural given the contrast between (63-a) and (63-c). This second observation suggests an asymmetry at least between *I* and *we* and between *suis* and *sommes*. Given that we require matching presuppositions between binder and bindee or between semantically agreeing T and DP, this means that first person plural presupposition is more tolerant, weaker, than first person singular presupposition. There are various ways of getting this result, although it is premature given that the full crosslinguistic empirical picture (how general the facts in (59) are) is unknown.[55]

We adopt a presuppositional approach to the binding and agreement patterns. Collins and Postal (2012) argue that the optionality found in (i)*Mommy and Daddy will enjoy ourselves/themselves in the Bahamas* challenge presuppositional approaches accepting MP: the first and the third person pronouns in (i) should be in competition, and the first person pronoun should win since it maximizes presupposition. We think such examples are in fact not problematic (and neither does Podobryaev, 2017, p. 344, fn 14, but for a different reason) because we take it that point of view/perspective/logophoricity plays a crucial role in binding relations (cf., Sportiche, 2022): the subject *Mommy and Daddy* can either be presented from the point of view of the child (the way you call me), in which case the pronoun must too (and thus be *themselves*, at least in a language without indexical shift); or it can be presented from the point of the speaker (a father addressing a child: the way I call myself when speaking to you) in which case the pronoun must too (and thus be *ourselves*).[56]

In sum, we adopt a presuppositional approach to the binding and agreement patterns that needs to be refined as compared to some standard approaches but is able to handle the relevant facts.

Many questions remain and, as noted, these remarks do not do justice to the full range of data discussed in Collins and Postal

(2012) including their "homogeneity" condition or the version of this condition defended in Podobryaev (2017). We again take it that this condition is due to constraints on perspective shifts (the facts are highly reminiscent of the distribution of logophoric pronouns in some African languages), but this discussion falls outside of the scope of the present article (but cf. Charnavel et al., 2025).

As final note, the special status of person as compared to number is highlighted by some additional observations suggesting that person agreement is in fact always semantic (which, if true, would mean that Agree is blind to person features or can't make person features LF invisible) as it satisfies generalizations (31-d) and (31-e), that is, *There is always me /* There am always me*, with excluded first person agreement. Similarly, paralleling examples in (27), (28), (29), and (30), but with person agreement, we find: (i) *Tout que je peux voir est/*êtes Votre Majesté (All I could see is/*are-2pl Your Majesty)*.[57] This conclusion is consistent with the descriptive generalizations concerning person agreement in Baker; Baker's 2008 or 2011 S(tructural) C(ondition) O(n) P(erson) A(greement), or den Dikken (2019)'s (for whom it always requires a Spec/Head licensing configuration). This is also consistent with neural evidence (from ERP and fMRI experiments) showing that violation of person but not (standard) number agreement induces e.g., N400 effects usually associated with interpretative problems (Mancini et al., 2011, Mancini et al., 2017).

6 Conclusion

We documented that collective nouns, (pseudo-)partitives and DP conjunctions display a number of common properties regarding certain agreement patterns yielding a number of empirical generalizations. We reviewed a sample of proposals addressing these empirical generalizations and concluded that they are unable to derive or explain why these generalizations hold. We argued instead that current theories of agreement predict the existence of semantic agreement, cases in which ϕ-feature values (for person and number) found on a head are not formal reflexes of a syntactic relation of agreement but are semantically interpreted. We propose that the observed generalizations can be accounted for if these ϕ-feature values are interpreted the way they are interpreted when they are uncontroversially interpreted, namely as presuppositional, subject to general (syntactic) constraints on how presuppositions are enforced at LF.

If successful, this treatment of these descriptive generalizations meets our goal of not requiring any new assumptions or stipulations.

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55 If it proved general, one speculative way would be to assume that reference to the speaker via first person singular must be direct, unmediated by descriptive content (but possibly mediated by presuppositional content such as gender, or other markings). By contrast, in first person plural, because it includes others, reference to the speaker could be arrived at via a description picking up a group [with some refinements, see Ackema and Neeleman (2018)] as in *some people with me among them*, *me* thus satisfying this description. Note that this is consistent with (60) given that reference to the addressee cannot be direct: it is an essentially relational notion (see Charnavel, 2019, for relevant discussion). Podobryaev (2017) explores another option based on Sudo (2012).

56 We take it that *her Majesty/Excellence* does not formally pick out an addressee at all, hence can only bind *her*– although it may pragmatically be understood as addressing someone–and we take it that the use of third person is precisely to underscore the fact that a subordinate is not allowed to address a superior.

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57 This could also handle *c'est nous/* ce sommes nous/ c'est Pierre et moi/*ce sommes Pierre et moi (it's us/*it are-1pl us/ it's Pierre and me/*it are-1pl pierre and me)* (cf. Pollock, 1983). The possibility for some French speakers of *ce sont les enfants et moi (it are-3pl Pierre and me)* would suggest a more articulated spine where Number features and Person features are distributed on different heads, with Person higher than Number. These speakers would raise the subject to the specifier of Number but no speakers would raise it to the specifier of Person. Others would not raise to the specifier of Number.

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