

Syntactic Doubling as Innovation in Heritage Tamil

Phi-feature agreement and syntactic doubling can be analysed as different expressions of the same underlying operation (cf. Barbiers, 2014). Agreement between the subject and the predicate of a clause is viewed as expressing (a subset of) the features of the subject twice in the same construction. Doubling, on the other hand, is taken to be an instance of the entire lexical item expressed twice in a sentence. The two options are presented in (1a) and (1b), respectively. Barbiers notes that natural language allows only (1a). Syntactic doubling of arguments (1b) is not attested.

(1a) The flowers are blue. (1b) The flowers are blue flowers.

This abstract presents novel data from Heritage Tamil (HT) spoken in New Delhi, with Hindi-Urdu (Indo-Aryan) as the dominant L2. HT diverges from the tendency in natural language to keep only one copy of the subject DP in a sentence.

Tamil is a Dravidian language spoken predominantly in the southern part of India. Attributive adjectives in Tamil do not exhibit agreement. (2) is an example of ‘good’ formed using the property-denoting concept ‘goodness’ and the relativiser, and it remains invariant for the varying phi features of the modified nouns.

(2) *nall-a paiyan/ poNNu/ koLandainga*
 √good-REL boy.MSG/ girl.FSG/ children.PL
 ‘good boy/ girl/ children’

Predicative adjectives, on the other hand, exhibit gender agreement. (3a) has the same adjective ‘goodness’ and the relativizer. (3b) shows the adjective ‘tall’ being formed out of verbalising the lexical noun ‘height’ and then relativising the entire complex. Both, (3a) and (3b) are instances of predicative adjectives, and they both show agreement with the subject of the predicate.

(3a) *anda paiyan nall-a-van* (3b) *anda paiyan uyaram-aa-ga iruk-aan*
 that boy √good-REL-MSG that boy height-V-REL be-MSG
 ‘That boy is good.’ ‘That boy is tall.’

A subset of the features of the subject - MSG in (3a) and (3b) - appear twice in the derivation. However, baseline Tamil does not allow the complete doubling of the subject (4).

(4a) **anda paiyan nall-a paiyan* (4b) **anda paiyan uyaram-aa-na paiyan*
 that boy √good-REL boy that boy height-V-REL boy
 ‘That boy is a good boy.’ ‘That boy is a tall boy.’

In order to test gender agreement on predicative adjectives in a heritage grammar, we conducted a picture-based sentence elicitation task. 23 speakers of HT (Mean age= 20.3) produced a total of 147 tokens of predicative adjectives. Out of these, 106 tokens (72%) were target-consistent; they aligned with baseline patterns (3). Of the 28% target non-consistent utterances, 11.5% (17 tokens) patterned with (4). We interpret these results as a preference for the syntactic doubling of subjects in HT.

In order to probe the doubling constructions further, we conducted a follow up task of Acceptability Judgement. 13 speakers (a subset of the earlier group) were presented with a total of 221 sentences such as (4), and asked to rate them in terms of their well-formedness. A simple aggregation of the rating shows that 82% of the sentences with doubling (n=181 tokens) were rated as well-formed. These results confirmed the earlier finding that HT shows a marked

preference for syntactic doubling in adjectival predicates.

Analysis: The underlying representation of (3a) is given in (5) below: Adjectives in Tamil are relative clause CPs; they are formed with aid from relativizers (see Cinque, 2010 for similar procedures in Romance and Germanic languages). They are base generated as a unit with the DP that they modify. It is the DP that saturates the valency of the adjective. The DP ‘that boy’ is displaced to Spec,PredP in order to be represented as the subject of the predicate (Baker, 2008; 2011). The move leaves behind a copy of the DP inside the adjectival unit. From Spec,PredP the subject DP participates in agreement with Pred. In baseline Tamil, the lower copy of the subject is ultimately deleted when the derivation reaches PF, as the features of the subject are already expressed on the predicative adjective. Retaining both copies would create redundancy at PF.

(5) [PredP [DP_i **that boy**.MSG] [Pred' [DP [CP [$\sqrt{\text{good}}$] [C REL]] [t_i]] [Pred **3MSG**]]]

As mentioned earlier, a third of the target non-consistent utterances in HT correspond to (4) . We claim that their underlying representation (6) differs from baseline Tamil (5) in two non-trivial ways. Firstly, deletion of the lower copy of the subject does not take place, resulting in both copies of the subject being pronounced at PF. Secondly, doubling of the subject DP forestalls agreement morphemes on Pred. The predicative adjective is thus realised with two instantiations of the subject DP - at the subject position, and concurrently with the adjective - and without agreement being marked on the adjective.

(6) [PredP [**DP_i that boy**] [Pred' [DP [CP [$\sqrt{\text{good}}$] [C REL]] [**DP_i that boy**]] [**Pred**]]]

In order to explain the tendency of (6) found in HT, we resort to a core definitional property of heritage grammars. Heritage grammars are characterised by the language acquirer having access to very limited PLD. Given such constrained acquisition conditions, the developing grammar has been argued to prioritise computational efficiency in different ways (Montrul, 2021).

We propose that the case of HT (6) diverging from Baseline Tamil (5) is an instance of a heritage grammar maintaining the derivational structure of a sentence while reducing the number of steps required to execute the derivation. In other words, Baseline Tamil involves DP displacement, deletion of the copy left behind, and participation in Agreement. HT, on the other hand, executes the displacement, but does not delete or facilitate agreement. Additionally, non-deletion has led to two expressions of the phi features: once in the subject, and once as part of the predicate (6). Under an account where agreement is seen as doubling of features (Barbiers, 2014), the patterns seen in HT show an instance of a heritage grammar using one alternative (doubling) in place of the other (agreement). In this manner, the derivational structure of the sentence is retained without additional steps. This can be understood as a case of innovation in heritage grammars.

References

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