Separating Concord and Agree: the Case of Zazaki Ezafe

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Ezafe – a phenomenon most well-known from Persian wherein a vowel is inserted between nominal modifiers (including those in a series) – is a common feature of many Iranian languages, and has received a variety of treatments, ranging from the purely phonological, to case-driven accounts, or the result of agree-driven movement (Ghomeshi, 1997; Samiian, 1994; Kahnemuyipour, 2014). In this talk we take Ezafe to be a resolution of a Chomsky, 2013-style labelling problem at the merging of an NP and a phrase-level modifier, which triggers the former to undergo movement into the specifier of an agreement-related projection which immediately dominates it. This is counter to analyses such as by Toosarvandani and van Urk (2014) who take Ezafe to be a functional projection uniformly taking AP or Possessor modifiers in its complement.

The case of Ezafe in Zazaki (a Northwestern Iranian Language spoken in Eastern Turkey) is of particular interest as the Ezafe morpheme expresses both phi-features and case (unlike e.g. Persian Ezafe). However, there are some puzzling deficiencies in the paradigm: while the morpheme uniformly agrees in phi-features with the head noun it modifies, and usually obeys case concord across the DP, the presence of a possessor triggers oblique case on the Ezafe morpheme, while nevertheless maintaining phi-agreement with the head noun. We argue that phi-feature agreement on Ezafe is the result of regular agree, and that case concord is the result of Norris (2017)-style feature-spreading, which may fail to manifest when the case-feature on Ezafe is valued DP-internally due to the existence of a possessor.

As noted above, Ezafe in Zazaki agrees with the gender and number of the head noun, and changes form based on case, of which the language has two (in the present tense): nominative and 'oblique' (Paul, 1998). Consider the data below from Toosarvandani & van Urk (2014):

(1) a. Ju bız=**a**   gırs=e vaş   wen-a.
    one goat=**F.EZ.SG.NOM** big-F   grass eat.PRS-3SG.F
    'A big goat is eating grass.'
  b. Kutık=**o**   gırs mı   vinen-o
    dog=**M.EZ.SG.NOM** big 1SG.OBL see.PRS-3SG.M
    'The big dog sees me.'

(2) a. Bız=**a**   Alik=i   vaş   wen-a.
    goat=**F.EZ.OBL** Alik=OBL.M.SG grass eat.PRS-3SG.F
    'Alik's goat is eating grass.'
  b. Ga=**yê**   Alik=i   vaş   wen-a.
    ox=**M.EZ.OBL** Alik=OBL.M.SG grass eat.PRS-3SG.F
    'Alik's ox is eating grass.'

In (1a) & (1b), one can see phi-agreement with the head noun, and the nominative case of the full DP realised on the Ezafe. Meanwhile, when the nominative subject is a possessive construction as in (2), Ezafe's phi-agreement with the head noun persists, but its case appears as oblique. This puzzle is at the core of Toosarvandani & van Urk's (2014) analysis, which ultimately posits bi-directional agreement relations from the Ezafe head, which probes upwards to agree in phi-features with the head-noun, but downwards to value case from a possessor merged in its complement.

We argue that in the absence of a possessive construction, valuation of case comes from Norris (2017)-style case concord, but when a possessor is merged, case may be valued DP-internally, after which no further case marking may appear on the Ezafe, regardless of what structural case the DP receives. In both AP and possessor modification scenarios, the head-noun merges alongside the modifier, but subsequently moves to the specifier of EzP directly above to resolve the labelling conflict, and phi-features on Ezafe are then valued accordingly. When a possessor is merged however, the NP may value its case feature in its first-merge position against the Possessor, and the Ezafe will then agree with this value once the NP has raised, rather than reflecting case concord.

We take a clear stance on the separation between concord and agreement mechanisms, and take the Zazaki Ezafe paradigm to reflect this division. Furthermore, we make a distinction between DP-internal (i.e. genitive) and -external case and show how this difference interects with nominal concord patterns – an issue to be further investigated cross-linguistically. Finally, we motivate the roll-up style movement seen in Ezafe constructions (Kahnemuyipour, 2014) as a resolution of labelling conflicts, à la Chomsky (2013).

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