

# The Agreement Theta Generalization\*

Maria Polinsky & Omer Preminger

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## 1. Introduction

In this squib, we propose a new generalization concerning the structural relationship between theta assigners and heads showing morpho-phonologically overt agreement, when the two interact with the same argument DP. At a first approximation, the generalization can be stated as follows:

(1) THE AGREEMENT THETA GENERALIZATION (first version)

Let  $\psi$  be the predicate that assigns a thematic role to a given DP; and let  $F^0$  be a verb or tense/aspect/mood marker that exhibits overt agreement with that DP in phi-features.

Then **either**:

- a.  $F^0$  and  $\psi$  are in the same clause:  $[\text{Clause} \dots F^0 \dots \psi \dots ]$ ; **or**
- b.  $F^0$  is in a higher clause than  $\psi$ :  $[\text{ClauseA} \dots F^0 \dots [\text{ClauseB} \dots \psi \dots ] \dots ]$ .

What (1) categorically excludes is situations in which the theta assigner,  $\psi$ , is located in a higher clause than the agreeing head,  $F^0$ :

(2) \*  $[\text{ClauseA} \dots \psi \dots [\text{ClauseB} \dots F^0 \dots ] \dots ]$

Note that the DP to which  $\psi$  assigns a theta role, and which  $F^0$  targets for agreement, is intentionally left out of the diagrams in (1–2); we return to the issue of the possible positions of the DP below.

Importantly, we do not claim here that (1) holds of all possible instances where features of a particular nominal get transferred to another constituent—be that another DP-internal modifier, a clausemate constituent, or a constituent in a separate clause. The generalization is thus not directly about *Agree* (Chomsky 2000, 2001), nor about any other theoretical mechanism; it is a generalization about a particular kind of morpho-phonological covariance, and its relationship to syntactic and thematic structure. This distinction is important because, in recent years, a variety of other phenomena involving correspondence between multiple syntactic elements have been argued to rely on the same underlying mechanism responsible for overt phi-feature agreement between a verb or tense/aspect/mood marker and a nominal argument. These include: nominal concord (Baker 2008, Carstens 2000, Mallen 1997); negative concord (Zeijlstra 2004, 2008b); modal concord (Zeijlstra 2008a); binding (Kratzer 2009, Reuland 2011, Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011); and control (Landau 2000 *et seq.*). We choose to focus on overt phi-agreement between a verb or tense/aspect/mood marker and a nominal argument, because this type of covariance is very well defined. Whether our findings in this narrowly defined domain do or do not end up generalizing to other instances of covariance is one of the factors that should ultimately determine whether these other instances should be reduced to the same underlying mechanism. But thorough consideration of the latter question requires, first, a careful investigation of the nature of each type of covariance unto itself, and it is this type of investigation that we undertake here.

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It is also important to define what we mean by ‘clause’ (as referenced in (1–2)). For the purposes of this squib, we adopt a standard approach according to which there are three clausal layers: the outer CP layer, the middle TP layer, and the inner  $\nu$ P layer; and we focus on phi-agreement realized in the TP and  $\nu$ P layers (a choice we will defend in section 4). Any agreement relation that relates a head in the interior of one CP with a nominal in the interior of another will then be considered cross-clausal, for our current purposes.<sup>1</sup>

While our primary point here is that (something close to) the generalization in (1) holds of natural languages, we will show that, insofar as this generalization is correct, it has significant theoretical implications. In particular, it casts doubt on theories of agreement that resort to DOWNWARD VALUATION (that is, transmission of feature values from a structurally higher element to a structurally lower one; see Abels 2012, Adger 2003, Baker 2008, Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2014, 2015, Carstens to appear, Merchant 2006, 2011, Wurmbrand 2011, 2012, Zeijlstra 2012, among others), at least as far as phi-features are concerned.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, this holds whether the theories in question require DOWNWARD VALUATION outright, or merely permit it as an option. The proposed generalization also casts doubt on another family of theories: those that treat agreement as a formally symmetric relation.

## 2. The robust attestation of cross-clausal agreement

It is uncontroversial that DPs are often targeted for agreement by a head located in the same clause where the DP is assigned its thematic role; the scenario in (1a) is therefore unremarkable. Likewise, the scenario in (1b)—i.e., agreement targeting a DP whose theta assigner is located in a subordinate clause—is neither highly exceptional nor exceedingly rare in natural language (see also Polinsky 2003, Preminger & Polinsky 2015). The scenario in question is well attested the Nakh-Dagestanian languages Hinuq, Khwarshi, and Tsez (Forker 2013:634–638, Khalilova 2009:383–390, Polinsky & Potsdam 2001); in “substandard” Basque (Etxepare 2006, Preminger 2009); in the Algonquian languages Innu-Aimûn and Passamaquoddy (Branigan & MacKenzie 2002, Bruening 2001); in Latin (Haug 2014, Haug & Nikitina 2012); and possibly in Romanian and Greek (Alexiadou et al. 2012).<sup>3</sup> And this list is by no means exhaustive.

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<sup>1</sup>Adopting these premises, it is possible to account for some—but not all—restrictions on cross-clausal agreement in terms of restrictions on phases. Baker (2008), for example, places the explanatory burden of such agreement restrictions almost entirely on Chomsky’s (2001) *Phase Impenetrability Condition* (PIC). At least two considerations militate against this reliance on the PIC. First, there is no consensus on whether or not all  $\nu$ P’s constitute strong phases, with the phasehood of unaccusative  $\nu$ P’s being controversial (cf. Legate 2003, Richards 2007a, who argue that all  $\nu$ P’s are phases, regardless of transitivity/causativity; and see Gallego 2012 for counterarguments). Meanwhile, the generalization described in this squib cuts across different types of  $\nu$ P’s. Second, and more important, the literature contains overly many—and overly disparate—assumptions and definitions for phasehood to give the proposal that phases restrict agreement any concrete predictive power.

<sup>2</sup>What we refer to here as DOWNWARD VALUATION has been described elsewhere in the literature in terms of the directionality of the posited search operation (cf. *Upwards Agree*; Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2014, 2015, Zeijlstra 2012). We depart from this terminology because we consider it useful to focus on the direction of valuation—allowing us to discuss things at the level of the phenomenon, without committing to one particular mechanism of feature-value transmission over another. See Preminger 2014 for a critique of Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) conception of *Agree* that is unrelated to this directionality issue.

<sup>3</sup>The Romanian and Greek data are less conclusive, and may also be accounted for in terms of scrambling under restructuring; see Potsdam & Polinsky (2008).

Several examples that instantiate (1b) are given in (3–5). Considerations of space preclude us from faithfully reproducing the arguments that each of these cases indeed has the structure in (1b); the reader is referred to the cited works for the relevant argumentation.

(3) TSEZ

a. Eni-r [ **uži**  $\phi$ -āy-ru-ĥi ]  $\phi$ -iy-xo.  
 mother-DAT **boy.I(ABS)** I-arrive-PAST.PRT-NMZ I-know-PRES  
 ‘The mother knows that as for the boy, he arrived.’

b. Eni-r [ už-ā **magalu** **b-āc’-ru-ĥi** ] **b-iy-xo**.  
 mother-DAT boy-ERG **bread.III(ABS)** III-eat-PAST.PRT-NMZ III-know-PRES  
 ‘The mother knows that as for the bread, the boy ate it.’ [Polinsky & Potsdam 2001:606]

(4) “SUBSTANDARD” BASQUE

[ **Harri horiek** *altxa-tze-n* ] probatu [d- **it-** u- zte]<sub>aux</sub>.  
**stone(s) those<sub>pl</sub>(ABS)** lift-NMZ-LOC attempted 3.ABS- **pl.ABS-**  $\sqrt{\text{ }}$ - 3pl.ERG  
 ‘They have attempted to lift those stones.’ [Etxepare 2006:333]

(5) INNU-AIMÛN

a. ni-tshissenim-âu [ **Pûn** *kâ-mûpisht-âshk* *pro*<sub>2</sub> ].  
 1-know-3 **Paul** PRT-visited-2/INV  
 ‘I know that Paul visited you.’

b. **tshi-tshissît-âtin** [ *kâ-uîtshi-shk* *pro*<sub>2pl</sub> **Pûn** *utâuia* ].  
 2-remember-1/2pl PRT-helped-3/2pl Paul father  
 ‘I remember that Paul’s father helped you.’ [Branigan & MacKenzie 2002:389]

In each of the examples in (3–5), an argument DP receives its thematic role from a predicate in the embedded clause, and is agreed with by a syntactic head located in the superordinate clause.

In principle, one could try to explain away such cases by claiming that cross-clausal agreement is illusory, and what is being targeted for agreement is always the embedded clause in its entirety, or some other “mediating” projection (see Polinsky 2003 for the range of possible analyses). While we do not deny that there may be cases that superficially resemble (1b) for which such mediated agreement turns out to be the proper analysis, it has been shown that this is an incorrect analysis for Tsez, some varieties of Basque, or Innu-Aimûn (see Branigan & MacKenzie 2002, Polinsky 2003, Polinsky & Potsdam 2001, Preminger 2009, Preminger & Polinsky 2015; and see, in particular, Preminger 2009:628–635 on how to empirically distinguish mediated and non-mediated agreement).

As noted above, (3–5) are merely a few representative examples of a wider pattern. We therefore conclude that alongside (1a), the configuration in (1b) is also well attested.

### 3. The typological gap

Some examples of what (2) would look like, were it possible, are provided by Baker (2008:75):

- (6) a. \* Three women said that there seem that it will rain.  
 b. \* I told three women that there seem that it will rain.

Baker asserts that such examples are ruled out on independent grounds—namely, Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) *Phase Impenetrability Condition*. While this may indeed be a sufficient explanation for (6a–b) in particular, it cannot explain the overall absence of instances of (2). That is because, to explain the absence of (2) in these terms, one would need to assume that natural language rules out the occurrence of an agreeing head not immediately contained in a phase:

- (7) NECESSARY ASSUMPTION FOR A Baker 2008-STYLE ACCOUNT OF (2):  
 \* [XP<sub>(phase)</sub> [YP<sub>(non-phase)</sub> [FP<sub>(non-phase)</sub> F<sup>0</sup><sub><phi-probe></sub> ... ] ] ]

But the assumption in (7) is problematic; at least two very common patterns militate against it.<sup>4</sup> First, if infinitives lack the sort of phasal infrastructure associated with their finite counterparts, the existence of agreeing infinitivals (in Portuguese and certain other Romance dialects: Raposo 1987, Scida 2004; in Hungarian: Kiss 2002, Tóth 1999; and in several Nakh-Dagestanian languages: Gagliardi et al. 2014, Polinsky 2015) is evidence against (7). Second, the existence of A-raising out of finite clauses (in Korean: Yoon 2007; in Japanese: Kuno 1976; in Greek: Alexiadou et al. 2012, Ingria 1981, Joseph 1976; and in several Bantu languages: Halpert & Zeller 2015, Zeller 2006) militates against (7), as well. Thus, we cannot maintain (7), and so we cannot maintain Baker’s account for the absence of configurations like (2) in the general case.

To make things somewhat more concrete, let us illustrate one configuration in which we would have *expected* this kind of agreement to arise, were (2) not systematically excluded. Suppose that the clause containing F<sup>0</sup> is a raising- or ECM-sized infinitive; that the verb contained in this infinitive is an unaccusative verb, whose subject has remained in situ; and that the language in question is one in which infinitives show overt phi-agreement:

- (8) [ ... ψ ... DP ... [non-fin. clause ... F<sup>0</sup> ... V S ... ] ]  
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If (2) were not systematically excluded, the agreeing infinitive in (8) (or, more accurately, the instance of F<sup>0</sup> inside this infinitival clause) would be able to find—and agree with—a DP argument in a higher clause. This is so even if the DP in question is thematically unrelated to the embedded infinitival clause (as is the case in (8)). The ingredients for this state of affairs (raising-/ECM-sized complement clauses, agreeing infinitives, and in situ arguments of unaccusatives) are all well attested; that something like (8) never arises thus constitutes evidence that (2) is a meaningful typological gap.

A similar point can be made by considering Tsez once more. In (9a), the embedded verb agrees with the absolutive argument in the embedded clause (*balahyabi* “troubles.II.PL”).

- (9) a. eniy-ā xiyal b-oy-s [ balahyabi r-ay-ā-č’i ]  
 mother-ERG wish.ABS.III III-make-PST.EVID troubles.II.PL II-come-INF-NEG  
 ‘Mother wished for nothing bad to happen.’ (*lit.*: ‘Mother wished for troubles not to come.’)

<sup>4</sup>The same phenomena also cast doubt on “feature-inheritance” (the idea that phi-features are passed down from the phase head to the head of its complement; Chomsky 2008, Richards 2007b, a.o.). Beyond conceptual argumentation, the main empirical support for feature-inheritance comes from the same raising and ECM configurations that are at the center of Baker’s (2008) discussion, as well as from West Germanic complementizer agreement (which, upon closer inspection, provides evidence against feature-inheritance rather than support for it; see Haegeman & van Koppen 2012).

- b. \* eniy-ā xiyal b-oy-s [ balahyabi b-ay-ā-č'i ]  
 mother-ERG wish.ABS.III III-make-PST.EVID troubles.II.PL III-come-INF-NEG  
*Intended:* ‘Mother wished for nothing bad to happen.’ / ‘Mother wished for troubles not to come.’

Were (2) not categorically excluded, one might expect that, alongside (9a), we would also find (9b), where the embedded verb agrees with a nominal in the superordinate clause (*xiyal* “wish.ABS.III”).

As with the more abstract (8) above, it is possible that there is some independent factor that rules out (9b) in particular. But our point is that nothing like (8) and (9b) is ever attested, despite the fact that the relevant clausal peripheries are provably permeable to valuation relations (as attested by the Tsez data in (3a–b)). Treating this lack of attestation as a series of coincidences, whereby each particular type of example receives its own dedicated explanation, misses an important generalization—and this generalization is what (1) and (2) are meant to capture.

To recapitulate, what we find is the following typology (square brackets indicate clause boundaries,  $\psi$  a theta assigner, and  $F^0$  a head that agrees with the same DP that  $\psi$  theta-marks):

(10)

		<i>attested?</i>
a.	$F^0$ and $\psi$ are clausemates	✓
b.	[ ... $F^0$ ... [ ... $\psi$ ... ] ] ( $F^0$ in higher clause, $\psi$ in embedded clause)	✓
c.	[ ... $\psi$ ... [ ... $F^0$ ... ] ] ( $\psi$ in higher clause, $F^0$ in embedded clause)	✗

#### 4. Refining the generalization

Before turning to the theoretical implications of this typology, let us first refine certain aspects of (10) (and, concomitantly, of (1–2)).

The first issue that deserves attention concerns agreeing complementizers. To cite one example, Diercks (2013) discusses a pattern in Lubukusu (Bantu) in which complementizers appear to agree in phi-features with the subject of a higher clause (Arabic numerals in these Lubukusu glosses indicate noun class):<sup>5</sup>

- (11) a. Ba-ba-ndu ba-bol-el-a Alfredi ba-li a-kha-khil-e. (Lubukusu)  
 2-2-people 2S-said-AP-FV 1Alfred 2-that 1S-FUT-conquer  
 ‘The people told Alfred that he will win.’
- b. Alfredi ka-bol-el-a ba-ba-ndu a-li ba-kha-khil-e.  
 1Alfred 1S-said-AP-FV 2-2-people 1-that 2S-FUT-conquer  
 ‘Alfred told the people that they will win.’ [Diercks 2013:358]

<sup>5</sup>These are far from the only cases of complementizer agreement, of course. Perhaps the most well known, in contemporary linguistic literature, is the case of West Germanic (see, e.g., Haegeman 1992). What is unique about the Lubukusu data discussed by Diercks (2013) is that the complementizer appears to agree with the subject of a superordinate clause, as opposed to West Germanic where the complementizer agrees with the subject of the clause that it embeds.

Taken at face value, these data would seem to instantiate precisely the pattern in (2)/(10c), claimed here to be unattested; but there are two points to be made in this regard, one methodological and the other theoretical. Methodologically speaking, let us note that complementizers sit at the boundary between one clause and another. Within the theory of phases, for example, complementizers—along with their specifier(s)—belong to the next-higher spellout domain, separate from the interior of the clause (see, e.g., Chomsky 2001:13). Given the ambiguous clausal affiliation of complementizers, it is methodologically reasonable to first ask whether something like the Agreement Theta Generalization holds when one abstracts away from complementizers. We can then ask a second, separate question, namely whether complementizers do or do not fall within the stated generalization, and why. Thus, even if a generalization along the lines of (1)/(10) only holds if we stipulate that  $F^0$  must be *properly contained* in the relevant clause, that would already be a meaningful and noteworthy finding.

The other point is a theoretical one, and has to do specifically with the proper analysis of the Lubukusu data. Diercks himself argues that the mechanism underlying data like (11a–b) is not, in fact, direct agreement between the superordinate subject and the embedded complementizer. Rather, the complementizer enters into a local agreement relation with a phonologically silent subject-oriented anaphor; and it is this anaphor which enters into a relationship—in this case, binding—with the superordinate subject. And recall that the proposed generalization generates no expectations about the directionality of binding relations.<sup>6</sup>

$$(12) \left[ \text{TP Subject}_i \dots \left[ \text{CP OP}_i \text{ C}^0 \left[ \dots \right] \right] \right]$$

[Diercks 2013:372]

On Diercks' account, the *agreement* relation (the one between the complementizer and the null anaphor) is maximally local. And as shown in Preminger 2013 and Preminger & Polinsky 2015, maximally-local configurations are uninformative with respect to the directionality of agreement, because the direction of agreement in such configurations can be flipped by adding very local movement steps that would be difficult (if not impossible) to rule out.

It is an open question, of course, whether every instance of apparent agreement between a complementizer and an argument in a superordinate clause can ultimately be afforded the kind of analysis that Diercks proposes for Lubukusu. But coupled with the general methodological concern articulated above, we believe that it is a reasonable move to discard agreeing complementizers from the domain of application of the generalization in (1)/(10).

Another issue that deserves attention concerns the view that DPs can be assigned multiple thematic roles (see, e.g., Hornstein 1998, 2001). If one adopts such a view, then our definition of  $\psi$  in (1)/(10) is underdetermined, since a single DP could be theta marked by multiple different predicates. In this case, we would revise our definition so that  $\psi$  is identified with the predicate that assigns the DP its *first* thematic role. This way of defining  $\psi$ —much like the original definition, above—is tied to the fact that a DP cannot be merged(=occupy a position) any lower than where it receives its (first) thematic role. While we offer no new account of this fact, it is a fact that can be established independently of our present concerns; for example, the same assumption is necessary

<sup>6</sup>As noted earlier, to the extent that overt phi-agreement between a verb or TAM-marker and a nominal argument obeys the proposed generalization, but binding does not, there is an argument against proposals that reduce one to the other (e.g. Kratzer 2009, Reuland 2011, Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011); see the discussion in section 1.

to explain why a DP cannot take quantificational scope in an embedded clause when it receives its (first) thematic role in the matrix clause:

- (13) \* [The news report persuaded <sub>$\psi$</sub>  his<sub>i</sub> mother [that every boy<sub>i</sub> is a genius]].

Taking these two issues into consideration, we can formulate the following, revised version of the Agreement Theta Generalization:<sup>7</sup>

- (14) THE AGREEMENT THETA GENERALIZATION (revised version)  
 Let  $\psi$  be the predicate that assigns a given DP its (first) thematic role; and let  $F^0$  be a verb or tense/aspect/mood marker, properly contained in some clause, that exhibits overt agreement with that DP in phi-features. Then **either**:
- a.  $F^0$  and  $\psi$  are in the same clause: [Clause ...  $F^0$  ...  $\psi$  ... ]; **or**
  - b.  $F^0$  is in a higher clause than  $\psi$ : [ClauseA ...  $F^0$  ... [ClauseB ...  $\psi$  ... ] ... ].

Given the empirical picture surveyed in sections 2 and 3, we take the revised generalization in (14) to be true of natural languages. The next step is to ask what can be concluded from this.

## 5. Theoretical implications

Recall what it is that (14) rules out; it rules out structures with the general profile given in (2), repeated here:

- (2) \* [ClauseA ...  $\psi$  ... [ClauseB ...  $F^0$  ... ] ... ]

We argue that this gap can be straightforwardly accounted for if we assume that phi-feature agreement is only ever capable of transmitting feature values upward in the structure. Conversely, we show that any theory that so much as permits DOWNWARD VALUATION as an option requires a series of stipulations to block (2).

To see this, let us first consider the DP that is theta-marked by  $\psi$  and agreed with by  $F^0$  in (2). Given that DPs are generally capable of movement across clausal boundaries, it makes more sense to talk about the possible positions, rather than a unique position, that this DP may occupy. Now, crucially, thematic roles must be discharged in a highly local configuration (the standard assumption, it seems to us, is sisterhood with some projection of the predicate); and, as discussed above, DPs cannot be merged lower than the position where they receive their (first) theta role. It follows, then, that the DP in question *cannot occupy a position properly contained in ClauseB*. This, in turn, means that  $F^0$  is lower than any position that the DP could occupy in the course of the derivation.

At this juncture, a note on head movement is in order. The previous paragraph is phrased as though  $F^0$  were literally immobile; and we know that this need not be the case, strictly speaking. But a crucial property of head movement is that it is highly local. Even instances of head movement that appear to violate Travis' (1984) *Head Movement Constraint* are nevertheless clause bounded

<sup>7</sup>This revised version of the Agreement Theta Generalization does not make the typological gap discussed in section 3 any less surprising. In the particular example used to demonstrate this gap—an unaccusative with an in situ subject, contained in a raising-/ECM-sized agreeing infinitive—the embedded subject does not raise, and there is no control relation between the matrix and embedded clause. The modifier 'first' in (14) is therefore vacuous in this particular scenario, and so the revision to the formulation of the generalization does not affect it.

(see, e.g., Borsley et al. 1996 on long verb movement in Breton). This means that as long as our concern is which clause immediately contains a given syntactic element, we can safely abstract away from head movement for the purposes of the present discussion.

Returning to (2), then, we can reassert that  $F^0$ , properly contained in ClauseB, is indeed lower than any position occupied by a DP receiving its (first) thematic role from  $\psi$ . If phi-feature values can only ever be transmitted upward in the syntactic derivation—that is, if  $F^0$  must c-command the DP with which it agrees—then there is no way for  $F^0$  in (2) to receive phi-feature values from the DP, deriving the desired typological gap.

Now consider the same state of affairs in a theory that allows DOWNWARD VALUATION, i.e., a theory that permits  $F^0$  to receive phi-feature values from a DP in a configuration where the DP (asymmetrically) c-commands  $F^0$ . (See, e.g., Abels 2012, Adger 2003, Baker 2008, Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2014, 2015, Carstens to appear, Merchant 2006, 2011, Wurmbrand 2011, 2012, Zeijlstra 2012.). On such a theory,  $F^0$  stands in the proper structural relation to the relevant DP in (2) (the one theta-marked by  $\psi$ ) for agreement to obtain. One could attempt to block this on a language- and construction-specific basis, e.g. by asserting that ClauseB is syntactically opaque (cf. Baker’s 2008:75 discussion of examples like (6a–b), above). But as noted earlier, there are configurations where such moves do not seem obviously available (e.g. agreeing infinitives containing unaccusatives whose subject is in situ; see (8), above, and the surrounding discussion). And so, the overall absence, cross-linguistically, of configurations like (2) would remain a coincidence.

In fact, the state of affairs faced by theories that permit DOWNWARD VALUATION is arguably even more challenging. In our earlier discussion of the position of  $F^0$ , we restricted ourselves to head movement. That is because phrasal movement of a phrase containing  $F^0$  could not extend the c-command domain of  $F^0$  (since  $F^0$  would not c-command out of the moved phrase in its landing site). And so, if valuation must proceed upwards, we can safely ignore such movement for the purposes of agreement. For DOWNWARD VALUATION, however, the requirement is not that  $F^0$  c-command the DP, but that the DP c-command  $F^0$ . Therefore, if for example the phrase headed by  $F^0$ , FP, were to move in its entirety to the periphery of ClauseB, a DP merged in ClauseA would still c-command  $F^0$  at the landing site of FP. This means that any clause that is permeable to phrasal movement should, in the general case, be permeable to DOWNWARD VALUATION as well, making the cross-linguistic absence of (2) even more surprising.<sup>8</sup>

Alongside these consequences for theories that sanction DOWNWARD VALUATION, the Agreement Theta Generalization also provides evidence against another family of theories: those in which the agreement relation is formally symmetric. On such a theory, the relevant generalization is simply unstateable: there is no way to allow (14b) without allowing its converse. And a theory that is unable to state the generalizations that hold of natural language is in dire straits as a theory of the grammar of natural languages. Examples of formally symmetric characterizations of agreement include the *feature unification* mechanism at the heart of constraint-based lexicalism (see, e.g., Bresnan 2001,

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<sup>8</sup>A reviewer raises the question of whether or not the kind of phrases typically headed by agreement probes ( $\nu$ P/VP, TP) generally undergo movement out of their base positions. In this regard, it is worth noting that  $\nu$ P/VP-fronting is a common derivation of verb-initial languages (Clemens & Polinsky to appear). And the mobility of TP has been demonstrated in work by Abels (2001, 2003). Therefore, we do not think there is anything resembling a general ban on phrasal movement of categories such as  $\nu$ P/VP and TP.



Gazdar et al. 1985, Pollard & Sag 1994); as well as any variant of GB/minimalism that views agreement as feature-*checking* rather than feature-*valuation* (see, e.g., Chomsky 1993, 1995).

Before concluding the discussion, let us consider the well-attested configuration in (1b)/(10b), repeated in (15):

(15)  $F^0$  is in a higher clause than  $\psi$ :  $[\text{ClauseA} \dots F^0 \dots [\text{ClauseB} \dots \psi \dots ] \dots ]$

That (15) is possible (see, for example, the Tsez, Basque, and Innu-Aimûn data in (3–5)) is straightforwardly derived on any theory that allows UPWARD VALUATION (i.e., the transmission of phi-feature values from a DP to a head  $F^0$  that c-commands it)—including the theory defended here, where UPWARD VALUATION is the *only* permitted agreement configuration. Recall that theta assignment is maximally local; consequently, the DP argument of  $\psi$  must occupy a position in ClauseB, a position which is already c-commanded by  $F^0$ . Thus, if ClauseB is permeable to agreement (e.g. an infinitive), and/or if the DP to the periphery of ClauseB,  $F^0$  will be able to agree with DP under UPWARD VALUATION.

## 6. Conclusion

In this squib, we have introduced the Agreement Theta Generalization, a generalization concerning the structural relationship between a head that agrees with a DP and the predicate that assigns the (first) thematic role to that DP.

The importance of this generalization is that it allows us to reason about the directionality of agreement in a largely theory-neutral fashion. To reiterate a point already made in previous literature, local phenomena are not where one goes looking for arguments about directionality. By their very nature, phenomena that are highly local have intrinsic “analytical slack” that allows the direction of agreement to be reversed under very minor changes to the analysis. Such reversals may not cohere with particular researchers’ methodological preferences, but that in and of itself is not an argument one way or another; the only way to truly avoid this kind of analytical slack is by examining what happens in non-local scenarios. It is in this sense that the Agreement Theta Generalization constitutes an indispensable part of the empirical picture, and a crucial target of explanation for any theory of grammar and, in particular, any theory of agreement.

While it is well-established that thematic roles cannot be assigned across clauses, that alone is not enough to capture the Agreement Theta Generalization. But as we have shown, adding a single assumption—that agreement permits only UPWARD VALUATION, i.e., transmission of phi-feature values from a DP to a head  $F^0$  that c-commands it—is sufficient to derive the generalization. Our account of the Agreement Theta Generalization thus rests on only these two assumptions: UPWARD VALUATION, and the locality of theta assignment. We have shown that, in contrast, theories that require or even just permit DOWNWARD VALUATION (the transmission of phi-feature values from a DP to a head  $F^0$  c-commanded by that DP) can only derive these results by stipulation. And theories in which the agreement relation is formally symmetric cannot even state the generalization, in the first place.

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