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Natalia Logvinova

ILS RAS, Saint Petersburg

COPULA AGREEMENT HIERARCHY IN URMI NORTH EASTERN NEO-ARAMAIC DIALECT

1. Introduction

In the Urmi Northeastern Neo-Aramaic dialect, the copula basically agrees with the subject NP. Where there is no overt controller (*kárt=əla* ‘it is cold’), agreement is feminine singular [Khan 2016].

As this study will show, the rule of subject agreement does not always apply in constructions with defective controllers [Corbett 2006], e.g., controllers lacking a grammatical gender and person (like clauses etc.), as well as in constructions with number incongruency. Rather, the agreement rules can be formulated as a hierarchy of features not taking into account the syntactic roles.

The data were collected in the village Urmiya (Krasnodar Krai, Russia) in August 2021¹.

2. Copula agreement with defective controllers

2.1. Type “PP—NP”

The first type of the defective controller is prepositional phrase. This type of construction is exemplified in (1):

- (1) *dəpn=ət duccána madrás=əla*
side(F)=REL shop(M) school(F)=3F
‘{What is next to the shop?}
Next to the shop is the school’.

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Table 1. Agreement in the “PP—NP” type

Gender of the NP within subject PP	Gender of the predicate NP	Agreement	
		M	F
F	M	7	6
M	F	3	9

There are no clear agreement rules if the subject-like PP contains a feminine noun, while the NP in the predicate position is masculine. The majority of examples with the opposite gender distribution show feminine copula, which can be most probably regarded as the case of default agreement.

2.2. Type “NP—CLAUSE”

In this type of construction, the copula is either attached to the NP in the S position (conversely to the basic rule for copula to follow the P constituent) or omitted:

- (2) *mən culla yaccə xadıyt=ala*
 from all enormous.F pleasure(F)=3F
kat at tíyy=ət
 CMPL you come.RES.M=2M
 ‘The greatest joy is that you came’.

Table 2. Agreement in “NP—CLAUSE” type

Tense	Gender of the noun in S	Agreement		
		M	F	0
present	F	0	7	3
	M	3	0	3
future	F	0	8	0
	M	4	3	0

In the present tense, the copula either agrees with the S constituent, or is omitted. If the copula is replaced with a form of the verb *avə* ‘to be’ in the future tense, this form can have both feminine and masculine agreement if an NP in the S position is masculine.

2.3. Type “CLAUSE—NP”

- (3) *mán áha víd=ələ áha yácca*
 who DEM1.SG do.RES=3M DEM1.SG enormous.M
⁺*bukár=ələ*
 question(M)=3M
 ‘Who has done it is a big question’.

Table 3. Agreement in “CLAUSE—NP” type

Tense	Gender of the NP in P	Agreement	
		M	F
present	M	7	2
	F	1	8
future	M	7	1
	F	2	6

In constructions of this type, the copula predominantly (15 cases out of 18) agrees with the predicate NP in the present tense. The same is true for the future form of the verb *avə* ‘to be’.

2.4. Other constructions with S constituent deprived of agreement features

In (4), the S does not have any agreement features in principle:

- (4) *smúka mən cúllə šapíra ráng=əl*
 red.M from all beautiful.M colour(M)=3M
 ‘Red is the most beautiful colour’.

Table 4. Agreement in other cases

Type of the S	Gender of the predicate NP	Agreement		
		F	M	0
Adjective	M	2	5	1
Numeral	M	1	5	2
Adverb	F	4	0	3
	M	2	0	4

With adjectives and numerals in the S position, there is a strong tendency for the copula to agree with the predicate NP, while with adverbial subjects, the copula is either omitted or feminine.

2.5. Copula agreement with number incongruence

In constructions with a plural predicate NP and a singular subject NP, the agreement is predominantly (11 cases out of 15) with the predicate NP:

- (5) *mən cúllə yáccə davólt-i*
from all enormous.F wealth(F)-P.1SG
áyya ⁺xorovát=əna
DEM2.F friend(M).PL=3PL
'My greatest treasure are my friends'.

3. Conclusion

To complete the picture, the following rule should be added: if a predicate NP is a 1st or 2nd person pronoun, it attracts agreement [Logvinova 2020]. Thus, the agreement rules for Urmi NENA can be formulated as follows:

- (6) 1/2SG > 3PL > 3F > 3M

As was shown above, these rules apply regardless of what constituent is a subject or complement of the copula. So, if the subject constituent lacks agreement features altogether, copula can well agree with the predicate constituent or can be default feminine singular.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 — 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; CMPL — complementizer; DEM1 — demonstrative of the first type; F — feminine; M — masculine; P — possession; PL — plural; REL — relator; RES — resultative; SG — singular.

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