Against Number Harmony for Non-Paradigmatic SE

1. PROPOSAL: This paper discusses the agreement behavior of "non-paradigmatic se" (NP-SE) sentences. Ormazabal & Romero (2024) (O&R24) address this matter by postulating that agreement in NP-SE may operate in the phonology, through a process of "number harmony". We provide evidence to support the idea that NP-SE agreement is captured by AGREE (Chomsky 2000 and ff.), its variation following from a "accessibility scale".

2. AGREEMENT IN NP-SE: Much of O&R24's discussion revolves around the pair in (1)-(2), from Spanish. As they rightly point out, number agreement varies, in part due to anymacy of the NP in the VP internal position.

(1) Se {*censuró / censuraron} los documentos
se censor-3sg / 3pl the documents
'The documents were censored'

(2) Se {censuró / *censuraron} a los oponentes
se censor-3s g / 3pl ACC the oponents
'The oponents were censored'

O&R24 point out that there is a more general **asymmetry**, depending on whether the internal argument is **preverbal (and null) or postverbal**: the former shows a much more stable behavior (number agreement being obligatory), whereas the latter exhibits an erratic nature, which they argue falls within a "post-PF procedure that we call Number Harmony". In (3), the NP argument is preverbal, so O&R24 asume it is dislocated, "se" occupies [Spec,TP], and agreement manifests as standard verbal morphology (in (3b)) or as an accusative clitic (in (3a)).

(3) a. (Los documentos) se los censuró
the documents se cl-them censored-3sg
'The documents were censored'

b. (Los documentos) se censuraron
the documents se censored-3.pl
'The documents were censored'

3. NUMBER HARMONY: O&R24 point out that "it is surprisingly common to find examples where agreement is not triggered by arguments, but in fact by temporal DP-modifiers," as in (4):

(4) a. Se bailan los lunes
se dance-3.pl the Mondays
'We/People dance on Monday'

b. Se abren los domingos
se open-3pl the Sundays
'We open on Sunday'

c. Se trabajan los festivos
se work-3pl the holidays
'We work on holiday'

O&R24 conclude that "subject agreement behavior is completely unexpected. Numbers are big enough to dismiss them as performance errors." They further note that, unlike the data in (4), temporal nominal adjuncts fail to trigger agreement in other contexts, including impersonal verbs and unaccusative sentences (see (5)).

(5) a. Llueve / *Llueven todas las tardes / los domingos
rain-3sg / rain-3pl all the afternoons the Sundays
'It rains every afternoons / on Sunday'

b. Cayeron / *Cayó almohadillas
fell-3pl / fell-3sg small pillows
'Small pillows fell'

The conclusion of O&R24 is as follows: "agreement facts in NP-SE do not work as predicted by theories based on syntactic agreement […] For postverbal NPs, the verb may show up marked with a default singular number or it may harmonize postsyntactically with a plural NP." Such harmonization is defined as follows:

(6) **CONDITIONS ON NUMBER HARMONY (NH)**

a. Syntax plays a minimal role: it simply provides a structure where the set of φ-features in T includes a [person] value supplied by "se" but no [number], and where there is an NP nearby in postverbal position.

b. Agreement follows two different paths in that context: either it takes a default value (7a) or it adopts the value of the closest nominal (7b). When the nominal is singular, the verb never shows up in plural (7c).

c.

(7) a. Se censuró los documentos
se censor-3.sg the document
'Documents were censored'

b. Se censuraron los documentos
se censor-3pl. the documents
'Documents were censored'

c. *Se censuraron el documento
se censor.3pl the document
'The document were censored'

Crucial here is th condition (6a), which takes HM to be computed in linear proximity terms. Although there are grammatical processes in which adjacency may indeed play a role, the possibility that agreement can also resort to linear order metrics raises a series of conceptual and empirical questions that we address in the next section.

4. PROBLEMS FOR NH: At the heart of O&R24's analysis of NP-SE lies the claim that "the only option in these contexts is that agreement patterns are determined *by extragrammatical factors* […] [an] additional regularization process is a learned strategy imposed by means of socioeducative pressure" (our emphasis). Plausible as it may be, the proposal raises a series of conceptual questions, and—as we show—does not quite clear the empirical landscape of NP-SE. **On the conceptual side**, the first and more general question involves the very nature of agreement (and its side effect: structural Case; cf. Legate 2008): Does it operate both in the syntax and in the post-syntactic componen? If the answer is "yes," it would be unexpected, if only because the other key computational operation (Merge) does not take place in different components. Of course, the properties of some phenomena (afterthoughts, heavy NP shift, head movement, etc.) have been attributed to their post-syntactic nature, but even in those cases the debate is far from settled. **Empirically**, we should start by considering why,

descriptively, NH operates "to the right" (at least in the cases discussed by O&R24). If NH is akin to, say, vowel harmony, then it should operate to the right and to the left equally (Nevins 2010). A second consideration comes from the fact that what O&R24 refer to as NP-SE with "prevernal NP" or "postverbal NP" does not necessarily simply involve a difference in linear placement, but a deeper structural difference, involving or not a biclausal structure followed by ellipsis (in "preverbal NP" cases) (cf. Ott 2014). To round up the empirical side, consider (6b) in more detail. If agreement is ruled by linear adjacency, then the prediction is that both (8a) and (8b) be possible. However, they are fully out. In (8a), the plural NP is closer to the verb than the internal argument; in (8b), the linearly closer NP is singular (clearly, it is sandwiched in some sort of parenthetical, but if all that matters is linear order, it is not clear what the problem is):

(8) a. *Se amasan los lunes el pan
se knead-3pl the Mondays the bread
'Bread is kneaded on Monday'

b. *Se abren, la tienda, los lunes
se open-3pl the shop the Mondays
'The shop opens on Monday'

In the same vein, it is not clear why, under O&R24's system, the sentences in (9) do not behave in the same way. In all the examples, the verb is linearly adjacent to the a plural NP *dos días* (Eng., two days), but whereas agreement is expected in (9a) and (9b), it is not in (9c). The explanation cannot rely on linear order, but structural conditions: *dos días* (Eng., two days) is the internal argument in (9a), but it is neither in (9b) (where agreement targets the NP las postulaciones – the collections) nor in (9c), in which *dos días* is the specifier of an adverbial phrase.

(9) a. Se abren dos días más de plazo
Se open-3pl two days more of deadline
'Two more days of deadline are given'

b. Se abren dos días después las postulaciones
se open-3pl two days after the collections
'Collections are opened two days later'

c. *Se abren dos días después el sobre
se open-3pl two days later the envelop 'The envelop was opened two days later'

5. NH IS JUST SYNTACTIC NUMBER AGREEMENT: We assume a fully syntactic view of agreement, based on the Probe-Goal system outlined in Chomsky (2000), whose basic ingredients involve a Probe, a Goal, plus c-command. How can we, then, account for the variability that O&R24 (and others) have rightly observed? The key problematic observation about NP-SE is that T can optionally agree in number (plural) with an NP 'to the right'. We make two assumptions to capture that: (i) agreement obtains if the Goal is in the c-command domain of T and (ii) there are different degrees of accessibility of the Goal, in accord to the scale in (10), where options go from more (= 10a) to less accessible (= 10d):

(10) a. [T … [V … NP]] b. [T … [V … [K [NP]]] c. [T … [V … [P [NP]]] d . [T … [V …]] [NP]

Let us call (10) the "NP-SE Accessibility Scale" (NP-SEAS, for short). (10a) is the easiest case: the NP is the internal argument, so plural agreement follows unproblematically (this is "passive SE"). (10b) concerns DOM sentences ("impersonal SE"), where *a* heads a Case (K) projection that complicates (but does not block) AGREE. (10c) and (10d) go one step further. They involve agreement with an NP that is within a bona fide lexical preposition (heading a selected PP) and an adjunct, respectively. Both scenarios are discussed in O&R24. We suggest that there is a reanalysis process in both cases, albeit less nuanced in (10c). Technically, we take the plural NP to undergo what Pestesky (2007, 2013) calls Under-Merge, which involves the merger of the NP in the complement position of V (similarly to what Larson 2004 argues for adjuncts, in a non-transformational fashion). Note that this covers the entirety of cases of O&R24 with no need to cast agremeent out of the syntax.

6. CONSEQUENCES: There is at least one wrinkle left. Even when there is a plural NP to the right, agreement can be default. This is the (7a) case above. We claim (7a) may have different derivational sources. One of them is the same behind default agreement occurs in unacusative structures with postverbal subjects in Romance (Saura 2010, Rigau 1997, 2002). Following Obata et al.'s (2015) analysis of variation following from the ordering of operations, we take NP-SE to involve the structure [$_{vP}$ SE v [$_{vP}$ V NP]], where SE is merged with the vP (as the external argument). At that point, we have two possible scenarios: (i) SE raises to the subject position ([Spec, TP]), and then AGREE targets the NP (leaving a copy, which does not block AGREE) or (ii) T AGREES with SE, which then raises to [Spec, TP]. The scenarios to consider are in (11):

(11) OPTION A (plural agreement): ① Internal-MERGE of SE → ② AGREE (T, NP)
OPTION B (default agreement): ① AGREE (T, SE) → ② Internal-MERGE of SE

Whatever the relevant analysis for default agreement with NP-SE sentences, it must address the question of how come the postverbal NP is Case licensed. We conjecture varieties may also differ in licensing this NP: it can receive accusative Case (if v is φ-complete) (see (8a)), it can receive the relevant Case associated to DOM (as in (2b)), or else it can be left Caseless, triggering deviance (for speakers barring (7a), to begin with).

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