

Why Agree? Why Move?

Unifying Agreement-Based and Discourse-Configurational Languages

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Preface

One of the great mysteries of human language is the existence of movement operations. Why does movement occur? At every stage in the development of generative grammar, an attempt has been made to answer this question. It would not be an overstatement to say that the answer at any given point characterizes in an essential way the general nature of the theory at that particular point. In other words, every step in the evolution of generative grammar has been, in no small measure, an attempt to construct an answer to this question that is better than the one before. In Government-Binding Theory (GB), movement operations—in fact, all operations—are entirely optional, so Move α can move anything anywhere, anytime. Independent universal principles such as the Empty Category Principle and Subjacency extract from this overgenerated set of strings the subset that constitutes the grammatical strings of a particular language. In this way, the independent principles not only allow the theory to reach descriptive adequacy—in the ideal, of course—they also allow it to reach explanatory adequacy in that they “give a general theory of linguistic structure of which each [grammar of a particular language] is an exemplification” (Chomsky 1955/1975:77).

In GB, this “general theory of linguistic structure” is the principles-and-parameters approach, which informs us, among other matters, of how language acquisition proceeds from the initial state to mastery of a language. This is a particularly attractive prospect in that we have, in principle, a clear description of the initial state of Universal Grammar (UG), and such a description is a principal goal of linguistic theory. However, there is one problem. These so-called universal principles are often—perhaps always—a description of the problem. So long as we depend on such description, we cannot really know the nature of language—or, more precisely, I-language (Chomsky 1986). This is the basis for the Minimalist Program (MP), where effort is made to rid the

theory of any element that does not have a natural and independent justification. In an attempt to live up to this ideal, the direction that the theory has taken—although by no means the only direction possible—is to view operations as taking place only as a “last resort” (Chomsky 1993).

Since the early 1990s, at least three classes of movement have been discussed, two of which observe the last-resort nature and a third that does not. One type of last-resort movement is found in the work on linearization initiated by Kayne (1994).¹ On the basis of simple assumptions about hierarchical structure (asymmetric c-command) and its relation to linear order (precedence), Kayne has argued that “[l]anguages all have S-H-C order” (Kayne 1994:47), where *S* stands for *specifier*, *H* for *head*, and *C* for *complement*. This means that SVO (subject-verb-object) is the basic word order, and SOV and other word orders that do not conform to the universal order must have arisen by some obligatory movement. For example, “[i]n an OV language . . . the O must necessarily have moved leftward past the V into a higher specifier position” (Kayne 1994:48). Setting aside the precise nature of these movements, the theory predicts that they are obligatory, and further, that they are restricted to cases in which the output adheres to the “antisymmetry” order of S-H.

The second type of last-resort movement is a kind of movement that one might call “EPP-triggered movement” (where *EPP* stands for *Extended Projection Principle*). It is this type of movement that I address in this monograph, taking liberty with the term *EPP* to refer to a broader range of movements than just movement of the subject to Spec,TP. Included in this general type of “last-resort” movement are certain head movements, which I discuss in conjunction with *pro*-drop, and movements of the \bar{A} variety such as *wh*-movement.

The third type of movement is a purely optional movement that has properties very different from the last-resort type. Although it does not adhere to the last-resort nature of the first two kinds of movement, in recent theory it is suggested that optional movement is motivated in that it allows an interpretation that is otherwise not possible (Fox 2000; see also Chomsky 2001, Miyagawa 2005a, 2006). I will not discuss optional movement in this monograph.

Another mystery is the occurrence of agreement systems in natural language. There are two general questions to ask about agreement. First, what is the purpose of agreement? On the surface, agreement appears entirely superfluous in that information in one part of the sentence (e.g., plurality of the subject noun phrase) is repeated in another part of the sentence (e.g., as plural verbal inflection). Moreover, the content of the

agreement system sometimes appears patently random, as, for example, in the assigning of gender to noun phrases (e.g., Russian assigns feminine gender to the word *lampa* ‘lamp’). Second, why do some languages (e.g., the Indo-European family) have agreement, while others (e.g., languages of East Asia) apparently do not?

The goal of this monograph is to try to answer these questions about movement and agreement. But does it make sense to address, in one work, these two issues that are often handled as distinct phenomena? As it turns out, the answer to one depends on the answer to the other. So it is not only critical that we deal with both—in fact, the two issues at their core must be made to interact with each other in a meaningful way.

Why agree? Why move? The simple answer, I suggest, is that although agreement and movement are the result of distinct operations, they work in tandem to substantially enhance the expressive power of human language. Without agreement and movement, human language would be a shadow of itself for expressing human thought, impoverished to the degree that it would not be able to express such common notions as topic-comment, subject of a clause, focus, and content questions. Crucially, “agreement” here includes grammatical features of topic and focus found in what É. Kiss (1995) has called discourse-configurational languages.

This monograph is organized as follows. In chapter 1, I explore the answer to the question “Why agree?” In chapter 2, I take up the question “Why move?” In the rest of the monograph, I look at the consequences of the analysis presented in the first two chapters. In chapter 3, I suggest a way to unify two types of A-movement, the so-called EPP movement in languages such as English and a class of local scrambling in languages such as Hindi and Japanese. In chapter 4, I examine Kinande and Kilega, both languages of the Bantu family, which exhibit “agreement” and “movement” that are implemented differently but are consistent with the proposed analysis. I also look briefly at Finnish, which shares some elements with Bantu, and I propose a way of distinguishing A- and \bar{A} -movements based on phase architecture. In chapter 5, I explore issues regarding *wh*-questions. I also take up a related issue, the intervention effect invoked by certain elements in *wh*-questions. In chapter 6, I present concluding remarks.